JOHN LYON

OR

FROM THE DEPTHS

RUTH ELLIOTT

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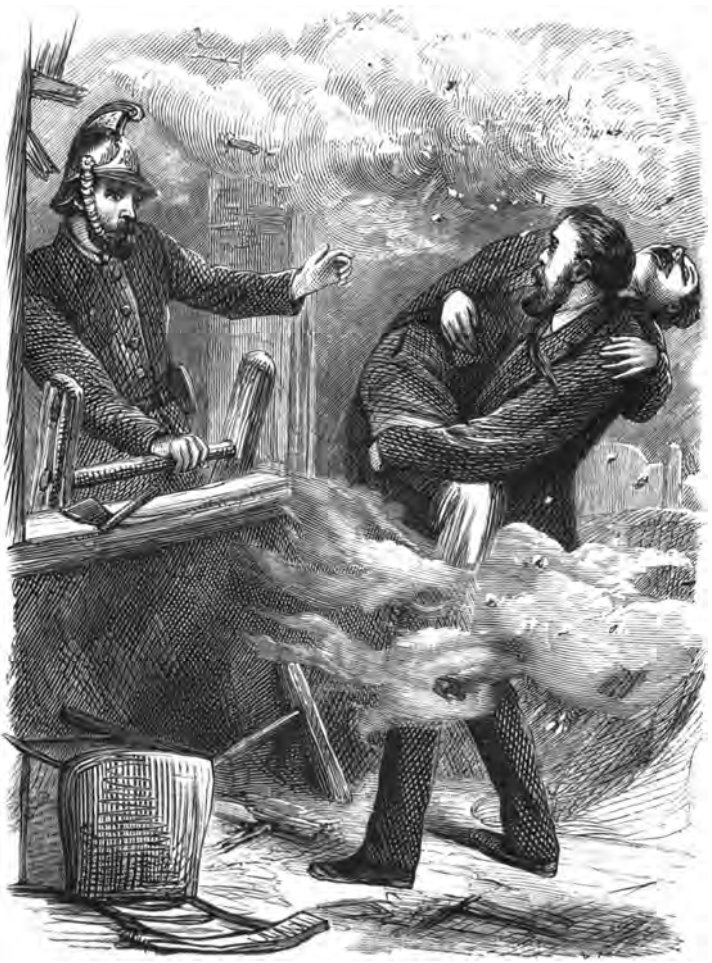

'A SECOND LOUD CRASH WARNED HIM THAT NOT A MOMENT WAS TO BE LOST.'
See p. 88.

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JOHN LYON;

OR,

From the Depths.

BY

RUTH ELLIOTT,

AUTHOR OF

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JOHN LYON; OR, FROM THE DEPTHS.

CHAPTER I.

ST. GILES'S—MIDNIGHT.

'. . . . . it is a glorious scene,
At which the fiends might clap their hands for joy,
And hold, in hell, a feast, to celebrate
The happy tidings, that a host of guests
Were paving for themselves a broad highway,
O'er which, with headlong and infuriate speed,
They might rush madly, in uncheck'd career,
To the eternal regions of the lost.'

AT the corner of a street in the neighbourhood of Seven Dials, a huge stucco-fronted building, with handsome pillars, mouldings, and cornices, towered high above the gloomy dwellings which clustered round. Along its front, formed by jets of gas, ran the letters which told its well-known name, and the brilliant light from its hanging-lamps made the surrounding darkness deeper and more apparent. Inside as well as out it was one blaze of light. Lustrous mirrors, in richly-carved frames, reflected the scintillating rays from the glass chandeliers which hung from the painted ceiling, and the countless gleams from the polished metal. Carved and gilded brackets upheld shelves, upon which stood ornamental bottles and glasses, and along the walls were ranged gigantic casks, bearing upon their gaily-painted sides the names of their various contents. The swinging plate-glass doors were never still; in and out passed the motley throng without a minute's cessation. It was raining outside; a chill, drizzling, ceaseless rain, which fell noiselessly upon the greasy pavements, and many crowded in for the sake of the temporary shelter. Young men and old; grey-haired women and ragged girls;

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little bare-footed children; all with faces that made the heart sick, and a strange wonder rise that of such it was ever said, 'He so loved.'

Near the door stood a man, rendered conspicuous by his height, and the quiet, grave way in which he watched the scene before him. He had not once approached the counter, and the men behind it looked at him with lowering faces; they evidently knew him, and it was equally evident that his presence was unwelcome. He was aware of it: more than once his eye fell upon them with a curious mixture of expression; indifference, anger, and sometimes of dislike and contempt, but he did not attempt to move. Once a woman reeled against him, as she passed out with a bottle of gin under her ragged shawl, and he stretched out his hand to her, but immediately drew it back; she was hopelessly drunk. A little child smiled up in his face as her tiny hand swung open the door, and he bent down and spoke.

'What, here again, Mary?'

The child nodded, and a cloud came over the pinched, weird little face. 'Mother made me,' she muttered, as she pushed her way to the counter.

The man sighed and drew back. The crowd was rapidly increasing, and he narrowly scanned each new-comer. There were strange faces among them; faces telling of lost power, of conscious and unconscious degradation, of reckless defiance, of stolid indifference. Here was the habitual drunkard, drinking as if to be drunk were the end and aim of life; and so it was to him. Here was the shivering wretch, gathering around her her drenched and ragged garments, and laying down her last coppers to buy a few minutes' blissful oblivion; waters of Lethe was the poison to her. Here was the sullen, dark-browed out-cast, scowling defiance at all the laws of man and God, and seeking only a mad excitement, and brief fictitious mirth. Here the trembling, hollow-eyed victim, whom drink had lured, drink had ruined, drink was killing; and here were the little children, bare-footed, hungry, pale-faced, with the image of God almost effaced, and the grace of childhood a conjecture alone, drinking at their parents' hands the fiery draught which heralded sin, and sorrow, and shame, and a long and bitter repentance. It was only a common city sight; one of the commonest of the common, one of the saddest of the sad.

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But such scenes as these; such unpleasant topics should not be brought before the public. There are societies, and city missionaries, and Bible-women, and other agencies for telling these degraded lower classes of their sins and iniquities. It is not right that the feelings of respectable people should be harrowed by descriptions of low, city life. There must, of course, be these lower strata; Providence has ordained it so; but the less they are talked about the better. There are men who are paid to do the unpleasant work of evangelizing these city heathen, and there all knowledge of them among respectable classes should cease. It is all very right and correct, no doubt; the wretched creatures must be looked after, but it really is not necessary that any details should escape from the stifling courts and alleys to disturb the well-bred equanimity of the middle classes and the upper ten thousand. There is no objection to a well-written history of the rise of some of the savages into respectability, or to a pathetic story of a little child who marvellously retained her innocence and sweetness in the midst of a hot-bed of sin and crime, and was taken out of the darkness into the light of heaven. In fact, it is rather pleasant to read such as these, for they give only the bright side of the picture, and can do no harm. But about those who do not rise, who remain in the depths, who live and die in their heathendom, and about those little children whose innocence is trampled out of them, and whose sweetness fades and disappears, it is better neither to hear nor read. They live by themselves, let them die by themselves.

Are these your sentiments? Then turn away at once from these pages before your refined sensibilities are wounded, and your cultivated taste offended by further revelations concerning those who share the name but scarcely the nature of humanity.

It was getting late, and at last the man pushed open the tavern door and went out. On the curb stood two girls; the one rough and coarse, but with an unusually kindly tone in her voice, as she urged, scolded, and entreated; the other with a despair painful to see in her thin white face. It had been a fair face once: the girlish contour, the fair hair and large brown eyes told their own tale of a bygone beauty. Seeing they were observed, they turned from the glare of light and passed into the gloom beyond, and the man followed. In the shadow of a doorway they stopped.

'I ain't going to lose sight of you,' said the elder of the

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two, vehemently. 'What do you want to talk like that for? You fairly make my blood run cold, you do! Go along with wanting to jump into the river, Rose Callaghan! What 'ud be the use of it?'

'I want to get away from it all,' moaned Rose. 'If you knew how sick and awfully wretched I feel, you'd let me go, Nancy.'

'Well, I shan't; so there now. Come 'long with me, and I'll get you some'ut that'll warm you up a bit.'

'It only leaves me worse after. Let me go, Nancy.'

'I won't; and there's an end on't. Come with me, I say; there's nothing like gin when you feel kind o' suicidy. Bless you, I know what it is; I've felt just so myself.'

Half persuading, half commanding, the girl drew her companion back to the tavern door, and pushing it open, was about to drag her in by main force, when a hand fell upon her arm. In anger she turned sharply round with insolent words on her lips, but seeing who it was they remained unspoken, and her face fell.

'Lor, Mr. Lyon, you're everywhere,' she said, with an attempt at easy impudence.

He made no reply, but stood looking down into the colourless face by her side.

'Are you going to seek forgetfulness in there?' he asked, gently.

'It's better than the river, at any rate,' said the elder girl, defiantly.

'But isn't there something better than either, Nancy?'

'Not for such as us,' she muttered.

'Why not?'

A short, contemptuous laugh was the only reply.

'I saw a girl this morning,' continued the quiet, steady voice, 'who was once *such as you*, but she found the way out of it.'

'Well, I don't want to find the way out, Mr. Lyon; so there! I know what you mean; we're to go to some of them what-do-ye-call-'em societies, and beg to be took in, and made slaveys of. Not for me, thank you.'

'Now, Nancy, you are talking nonsense, and you know it. Where are you going to take this poor child?'

'In there.'

'No, you are not.'

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'Then take her off to some better place yourself,' said the girl sullenly, yet with a slight accent of shame.

'No, I can't do that; but you can do it for me.'

'Where am I to take her?' she asked, after a minute's hesitation.

Taking an old envelope out of his pocket, he hastily wrote down two or three lines.

'There,' he said, folding it and giving it to the girl, 'you know where to take it to. Give it to Mother Willett, and she'll take care of Rose.'

He had not spoken to the younger girl beyond his first question, and she had listened to the conversation with the apathy of utter despair: she neither knew nor cared what they were going to do with her. Glancing up as Nancy seized her arm to lead her away, she met the kindly scrutinizing look of the dark eyes, and stood riveted to the spot.

'What do you look at me like that for?' she cried, passionately. 'Why don't you despise me, and trample upon me, and curse me, as others do?'

'Why should I? You have done me no harm!'

'I have done no one any harm but myself! Why don't you let me go?—no one wants me here!' was the despairing answer.

'Someone does want you, my poor child.'

'Who?'

For a moment he hesitated, and then said quietly, 'Your mother.'

With an inarticulate cry the girl turned and would have fled down the street, but Nancy held her fast.

'What right have you to speak of *her?*' she cried. 'How dare you so much as mention her name *here!* She doesn't want me—she's dead.'

It is impossible to describe the tone of hopeless agony with which she spoke the last two words, and even Nancy's hard face softened.

'Then she wants you more than ever,' said John Lyon.

They had left the brilliant light of the corner and were passing a lamp in the dismal street. Both the girls looked at him as he spoke, evidently wondering what he meant.

'Do you think,' he continued, gently, 'that your mother has forgotten her child?'

'But she's in heaven!'

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'What of it?'

'I'm not fit to go there!'

'No; not yet.'

'I never shall be!'

'And yet your mother is waiting for you, Rose.'

'No, no!' cried the girl, covering her face with her hands. 'She knows.'

'She knows that she wants you there, that's all.'

They were at the corner of the street, and Lyon paused and put his hand on her shoulder. 'Don't think about yourself any more,' he said, and his voice was full of cheering encouragement. 'All you have to do is to go home and get a good warm, and then go to bed. You are wet through, and as cold as ice. I will see you to-morrow. Nancy, can I trust her with you?'

'It wouldn't be the first you've trusted with me,' she replied, her tone implying resentment at the question.

'No. I wish I could trust you as readily with yourself.'

'Oh, ah! Come on, Rose.'

Lyon stood for a moment watching them into the darkness, then he turned another way.

'And do you really think you'll find her at Mother Willett's to-morrow morning?'

The question was asked in an incredulous, scoffing tone, and a man stepped from the shadow of the houses to Lyon's side and walked on with him.

'What have you been following us for?' asked Lyon, sharply.

'Oh, you saw me, did you? you've got eyes at the back of your head then, for I'll swear you never turned round. I suppose you are a city missionary.'

'No, I am not.'

'What are you going to do with that girl?'

'What is that to you?'

'Nothing whatever, personally, my friend. I am actuated only by a laudable curiosity to know if there is one particle, one atom, one infinitesimal fraction of faith in fallen human nature left. I regard you as a phenomenon, a being to be looked upon with awe and veneration, as retaining up to the present time your primitive simplicity and faith.'

At first Lyon could not tell if his new companion were drunk, or in one of the mad moods of desperation with which he was well acquainted; but in a short time a slightly un-

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steady gait and thickness in the voice betrayed that drink had done its share, though he was not entirely under its influence.

'Yes, I did follow you,' he continued, in an easy familiar tone. 'Every man's house is his castle, but the streets are free to all; therefore, my good friend, I took what you evidently consider a liberty, and followed you. Come now, *Fraternité, Égalité!*'

'*Égalité* in what?' asked Lyon, coolly, pausing under the lamp and surveying his companion.

'Only in our common humanity, not in the state of our pockets, probably,' replied the man, returning the scrutiny with interest: 'you think I'm drunk.'

This was said more in the tone of a statement than a question, and Lyon made no reply.

'Well, I'm not drunk; and would you like to know the reason?'

'Probably because your pockets are empty,' said Lyon.

'Exactly. I see, my friend, that you are blessed with at least an ordinary amount of acuteness; and, perhaps, in that we may find the *égalité* the suggestion of which excited your wrath. I said I was not drunk. It dawns upon me that I must be, since I am applauding in you the quality for the very absence of which I sought your acquaintance: and that carries us back to the beginning. Do you expect to find that girl at Mother Willett's to-morrow morning? Excuse the question, but I am a philosopher seeking material for a book, which is to turn topsy-turvy every established opinion. You don't believe it?'

'My opinion is an established one of long date, and, therefore, is one of the things your book is to overturn,' said Lyon, with good-humoured sarcasm.

'And pray what may it be?'

'That a man who is not able to control his own reason cannot expect to control the reason of others. I am afraid your book will be a failure.'

'Do you mean to insinuate that I am not in possession of my senses, that I have not control over my reason; in fact, that I am——'

'That you've been drinking,' said Lyon, as he paused for a word.

The man looked at him angrily, and then laughed and

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walked on in silence. He was quite young; probably not more than six-and-twenty, though he looked older. His dark hair was brushed low on his forehead as if to disguise its height, and gave him an appearance of want of intellect rather than of any unusual amount, which, from his conversation, he seemed to claim. He had taken off his hat, and was coolly holding it downwards for the rain to drip off, and Lyon had a good view of his face.

It was not an ordinary one; the features were too regular and well formed. A slight moustache shaded what had once been a handsome mouth, the lines of which were now curved into an unpleasant smile, and there was a reckless mocking look in his eyes as if he were laughing at and yet defying his own unspoken thoughts. With all its signs of dissipation, it was an attractive face, and John Lyon watched it with interest. He saw at once that his self-constituted companion was of a higher social order than himself; his very accent betrayed the educated and cultured gentleman, while his shabby clothes and general appearance showed plainly to what he had fallen.

'Well,' he said, suddenly, turning round, 'what do you think of me?'

'I think I should like to know you,' said Lyon.

'Which part of me? My name, my nature, or my occupation?' was the mocking reply.

'All of them, if you are willing,' said Lyon, entering into his mood.

'How can I tell you what I don't know myself? My name is Edward Gower; does it take your fancy? Now stop! I know what you are going to say: "What's in a name?" Wasn't that it?'

'No; I seldom quote Shakespeare. Where are you going?'

He put his hands into his pockets, took hold of the lining, and turned them inside out; something slipped from the corner, and fell quietly on the muddy pavement.

'Oh, oh, my friend,' he exclaimed, picking it up with an effort, and wiping it on his coat sleeve, 'I didn't know you were there.'

Standing under a lamp, he turned the coin over and over, trying to decipher the worn, smooth surface; but his trembling hands refused to hold it still, and with an impatient exclamation he turned to Lyon.

'Here, is it a threepenny or fourpenny?'

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It was a threepenny-bit.

'Of course! There it is again, you see.'

'There is what?' asked Lyon.

'The old story! The supply is never sufficient for the demand. If I had needed threepence, I should have found twopence; as I need fourpence, I find threepence. It is Kismet.'

'What do you call Kismet?'

'The great inevitable.'

'Men make a great many of their own inevitables,' said Lyon drily.

'For instance, if I had not spent what I took to be my last sixpence in yonder tavern, I should now have more than the needful fourpence?' replied Gower with *sang froid.*

'Exactly.'

'I read your meaning, friend, and perceive you are somewhat of a philosopher, too,—and there again see the *égalité.*'

There did not appear much equality between the two; the one with drenched and shabby garments, shaking hands, stooping shoulders, and unsteady gait; the other with firm, decisive step, upright, muscular frame, unweakened by excessive drink, and clear steady eyes, which told that their owner had never lost possession of himself. Both were tall, but there all personal resemblance ceased. Lyon's broad, powerful shoulders were a striking contrast to Gower's attenuated frame, upon which his coat hung like a sack.

Something of the contrast seemed to dawn upon the latter's deadened consciousness, and his mood suddenly changed.

'Excuse me,' he said, with a touch of hauteur: 'I have trespassed upon your time, and have, perhaps, intruded. I am a little skaky to-night, which must be my apology. Good-night.'

He turned abruptly into a by-street, but Lyon stopped him.

'Wait a moment,' he said. 'May I ask where you are going?'

'I am going home.'

Lyon knew that this was not true. He knew that the disappointment about the threepenny-bit was on account of an ordinary night's lodging being fourpence. Not willing to offend his new acquaintance, yet unwilling to part with him, he hesitated, thinking what to say.

'It is very late, and my home is close at hand; will you

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come in with me? I can give you a comfortable shake-down, and some bread and cheese. You can pay me for it if you like.'

'What with? The threepenny-bit?' was the ironical reply.

'Pay me when you have the money. Let it stand as a debt. Come, what about *fraternité, égalité?*'

For a moment Gower seemed inclined to resent the joke; but Lyon looked at him with such perfect good-humour and evident sincerity, that his face relaxed, and he turned and walked by his side in silence. A few minutes' rapid walk brought them into a quiet street, and stopping before one of the small, respectable houses which ran the whole length, Lyon opened the door with his latch-key and let his companion in. It was raining in torrents, and one of them at least was wet through.

'I hope my fire is not out,' said Lyon, opening a door on the first floor. A blaze of light greeted him from the cheerful-looking fireplace, where a good fire was burning briskly. Placing a chair before it for his guest, he went into an inner room, and in a few minutes returned.

'You will find dry things on the bed,' he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, as if it were one of the ordinary every-day duties of life to supply drenched guests with dry clothing. 'If you will go and change, I will send your things downstairs to be dried. I am going to send my coat.'

The easy, at-home manner was the best he could have assumed, and without a word Gower rose and went into the next room. In a short time he returned, dry and comfortable, and sat down again by the fire. He had brushed his hair and looked altogether different from what he had done before. The defiant look had gone from his eyes, and as he sat gazing dreamily into the fire his face seemed suddenly to have dropped a mask, and appeared young and handsome as it might have done before drink and dissipation had wrought their work.

A neat little old woman was busy placing supper upon the table, and Lyon was absorbed in what were evidently proof sheets. Now and then he glanced at his guest, but did not speak until the old woman had left the room.

'I don't know how you feel, but I want my supper,' he said, drawing his chair forward.

Gower shook his head, but without looking up. 'I don't want anything,' he said briefly.

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'Nonsense. At any rate, draw up to the table for company's sake.'

Very reluctantly Gower turned round. Just before him was a fried sole, tempting enough for the weakest appetite. He sat looking at it for some time, but made no sign. At last the temptation was too much for him, and with a shamefaced glance at Lyon he seized the fork and began.

'I have eaten nothing since yesterday noon,' he said, attempting an apology.

'Then you couldn't eat anything better than the fish. I'm a doctor, and recommend it; it's light, and easily digested.'

In fact it was the only thing the man could have eaten. He turned with loathing from anything solid, as Lyon knew perfectly well he would do. Fasting and drink had destroyed even the ability to take substantial food, as well as all inclination.

The warmth of the room, with the food, had its effect, and before Lyon had finished his supper, his guest was fast asleep with his head on the table. He cleared away the things near him, put a cushion under his head, and let him sleep on. It was the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion, likely to last uninterrupted for hours; and, putting a guard before the fire, he left him there, when he retired to his own room.

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CHAPTER II.

MOTHER WILLETT.

HE found him still sleeping when he rose the next morning, but he awoke him without difficulty and sent him into his room to put on his own clothes. He was quite a different man now that the effect of drink had been partially slept off. There was a careworn look on his face, and the recklessness and insouciance of the previous night had disappeared. He stood moodily before the fire gazing into it with darkened eyes. As the door opened he started, and seeing breakfast, immediately took up his hat and turned to go.

'I am your debtor,' he said quietly, 'I am afraid it will be a long time before I can pay you.'

'Will you in turn make me your debtor?' replied Lyon courteously. This was not the man to whom he could joke of *fraternité*, and he was too much the gentleman himself to attempt it. There is good authority for answering a fool according to his folly, but the fool in possession of his senses is another matter.

'If I could think it was in my power.'

'It is in your power. If you will take a seat I will explain how.'

Still holding his hat tightly in his hands, and glancing suspiciously at his host, he sat down, pushing his chair as far as possible from the table.

Lyon waited till they were alone and then proceeded to pour out the coffee.

'I will not detain you long,' he said, passing a cup towards him, as if it were a matter of course that he should take it. 'If you will draw up to the table we will get breakfast over as quickly as possible and be off: I am late already.'

Slowly, hesitatingly, Gower drew up his chair. By this time his curiosity seemed to be a little excited, and he looked keenly at his companion, but with no satisfactory result. All he

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could tell was, that he was probably a few years older than himself, and of a class in life inferior to his own, though how much so it was impossible to say. His critical, educated ear detected the accent of the people, and yet there was in all Lyon said and did an innate delicacy and refinement which lifted him from the ranks of the uncultured and marked him a man of a superior caste of mind. His massive forehead spoke of considerable intellectual force, while the firm lines of his mouth told of strength of will, decision of character. His eyes were the best and most noticeable feature in his face. Large, dark, and rather deep-set, they redeemed it from plainness, and possessed an attraction, and at times even a fascination peculiarly their own.

'What in the world is he?' thought Gower. 'Not a gentleman, certainly, and as certainly not an ordinary tradesman or working man.'

While he puzzled over the question Lyon looked up, and their eyes met. For the moment Gower was disconcerted, but quickly recovered his self-possession.

'I am wondering what the deuce you are,' he said frankly.

'Not a city missionary,' said Lyon, with a smile.

'No; that I'd swear to!'

'My landlady says I'm a Jack-of-all-trades,' continued Lyon. 'I suppose the world would call me a printer, though that has really little to do with my real life.'

'A printer! Umph.'

Lyon marked the change of accent, the slightly contemptuous expression on his companion's face, but went on, as if he had not noticed it.

'It is necessary in this arbitrary world of ours to possess a certain amount of money, and to obtain this, those who are not born to fortune must work. Unfortunately circumstances frequently prevent us from following the bent of our inclinations; we are forced into a certain groove by stern necessity, and by an equally stern necessity kept there.'

'Are you an agitator, a stump orator?'

'A stump orator, certainly not! What do you mean by an agitator?' replied Lyon, coolly.

Something in his manner, it might have been a certain indefinable dignity, of which Gower was unpleasantly conscious, repressed the words on his lips.

'What is it that I can do for you?' he asked, after a pause.

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Lyon rose and went to an old-fashioned escritoire standing behind the door. Opening it, he took out some books, and placed them on the table.

'Can you help me with these?' he asked.

Gower opened them carelessly. 'Greek!' he said, in some surprise. 'What do you want with Greek?'

Lyon made no reply to the supercilious question.

'Beg pardon. In what way do you want me to help you?'

'It is not an easy thing for a self-educated man to read Greek alone. Will you be willing to come here one evening in the week to read with me? I am not rich, and cannot give a large remuneration, but if your time is at your own disposal, you can afford to do this at a moderate charge.'

'How do you know I am competent to do it?' demanded Gower.

'Your tone and accent show the educated man. You have doubtless had a college education.'

'Such as it was,' was the bitter reply.

'Therefore I concluded you could help me in this.'

'And myself too, I suppose. You think it cuts both ways. Wouldn't Latin be of more use to you?'

'I do not require help with Latin,' replied Lyon, briefly.

Gower looked at him curiously. 'What else do you do besides printing, reading Latin and Greek, and picking up vagrant girls and drunken men? I wasn't quite drunk, though, was I?'

'No,' said Lyon, replying to the latter question only. 'What do you get drunk for?'

At the apparent simplicity of the question, Gower stared.

'It's a bad habit,' continued Lyon.

'Are you a Good Templar?'

'No.'

'What were you doing in the tavern last night?'

'I had an engagement with someone there, but he didn't come.'

'Of course, you were not there for any other purpose, were you?'

'Do you want to know if I was there for the purpose of drinking?' asked Lyon. 'Why don't you say right out that a man has no right in a tavern, except for that purpose?'

'That's what the publicans think, at any rate,' said Gower grimly. 'No; you don't look like a man who drinks. I suppose you are a temperance lecturer?'

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Lyon laughed. 'An agitator, a city missionary, a stump orator, and a temperance lecturer! Pray what else does your fertile imagination suggest?'

His laugh was infectious, and Gower laughed at his own expense.

'Well, you are a new experience to me,' he said, frankly. 'I've met with queer characters before now, but you are a little beyond my comprehension.'

'I'm beyond my own, sometimes. Will you walk with me as far as the Strand?'

They went out together, and walked down the street; Gower painfully conscious of his battered hat and ragged coat. He soon forgot it, however, in his interest in his new acquaintance, whose matter-of-fact manner, and somewhat abrupt directness of speech, suited him well. There was, too, a strong under-current of repressed energy and strength which excited his curiosity, and his vanity was piqued by finding in this self-educated printer a wider range of knowledge, a keener observation than his own. Intellectual equality or superiority will make itself known, and it was an intense pleasure to the roused consciousness of this man to meet once more a mind whose intellectual vigour raised it into a higher atmosphere than the tainted and enfeebled one he had been breathing of late.

The proposal to spend an hour or two a week over Greek he seized with avidity, and, at the time, really meant to fulfil his engagement. It put a new life into him, and he entered into the arrangement with an energy which surprised himself. Near St. Martin's-lane they stopped.

'Here our ways diverge,' said Lyon, 'you go your path, I go mine.'

Seeing the man's fastidious pride, he did not offer his hand, though for the moment it came naturally to him to do so.

'Is that the way to your place of business?'

'To one of them. Printing isn't my only business.'

'Ah, I understand. Would you consider the question an impertinence if I asked what you intended to do with that girl?'

'I intend merely to give her a chance.'

'Will it be of any use?'

'That I cannot tell. I hope so.'

'And the other?'

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Lyon shook his head. 'That is quite a different case. She hasn't found it all out yet.'

'All what?'

'The misery and shame. The time will come.'

'And meanwhile you are keeping her in sight.'

'Yes.'

'And what then?'

There was a pause. 'And then,' said Lyon, slowly, 'maybe God will show her the way out of it.'

'Do you believe there is a way out?' said Edward Gower, scoffingly.

'There was a way in.'

'That was the devil's work.'

'God is as strong as the devil.'

'And harder,' said Gower, as he walked away.

John Lyon walked on with the sharp, quick step of a man with a settled destination. At the door of a neat little house in a quiet street he stopped and knocked, and even the knock told somewhat of his character; it was firm, decided, and loud, and brought an immediate answer.

'I'm glad you've come, Mr. Lyon. I've been wanting you sadly.'

The speaker was a little old woman with a pleasant, cheerful face, and eyes brimming over with motherly kindness.

'What is it, Mother?' asked Lyon, stepping in.

'That poor child, sir. She's done nothing but cry ever since she came. I can't do anything with her; she won't listen to me; she stops her ears directly I begin to say a word.'

'Where is she?'

'In there, sir; maybe she'll listen to you; most folks do.'

There was an honest, loving admiration in the little old woman's eyes, as she followed him in. He was pretty nearly all the world to her, this strong, stalwart man whom she had known and loved from his childhood. Had she not washed and mended for him ever since he was six years old; and wasn't it at her knee he had learnt his letters? To be sure. And didn't he always treat her 'most as if she were his own mother? Of course he did, and she was glad and proud of it, and thought there was no one in the land his equal; a harmless delusion which Lyon laughed at and rather liked. No one is quite without a slight touch of vanity, and it is rather pleasant to be believed in; at least, John Lyon thought so.

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On a sofa in the tidy, comfortable little room, lay the girl he had sent there the previous night. She was still in her drenched clothes, for she had refused to be touched. Her companion sat by her side talking vehemently, but on seeing Lyon, subsided into silence.

'So you are here, still, Nancy,' he said, kindly.

'I couldn't leave her 'long with Mother Willett like this,' she muttered, half sulkily. 'She come out of quod yesterday, and now nothin'll do but that there blessed river.'

'Is she a friend of yours? I don't remember seeing her before.'

'Because you've been away so long. She has been about with me off and on this last month; she's been in prison a week.'

It was noticeable that the girl's voice insensibly softened, and she dropped much of her ordinary slang, when speaking to him.

'What did she go to prison for?'

'The silly little fool stuck to it that she saw her mother one night, and made such a row that they took her up for being drunk and disorderly.'

'I wasn't drunk,' said Rose, lifting her swollen face from the cushion in which it had been buried, 'I tell you I did see her, as plain as that picture.'

'I thought your mother was dead, Rose?' said Lyon, taking a seat beside her.

'So she is. But I saw her! I tell you, I saw her! She just looked at me, and then put up her hand, so; and went away. They said I was drunk, and I let them say it; I didn't care! I wish I were dead! oh, I wish I were dead!'

'And if you were dead, what then?' said Lyon, steadily. His grave, gentle voice stopped her sobs, and she was silent. 'Poor child!' he continued, pityingly; 'you have found the battle a hard one. But it isn't over yet, Rose.'

Still she listened in silence.

'Do you know that an army often fights the better after a defeat? It is so; they rouse themselves, and determine to win back what they have lost; to conquer, or to die. I wonder what your defeat will do for you.'

'For me?'

'Yes, for you. Life consists of a series of battles; minor ones, comprising one grand whole.'

His voice, perhaps, more than the words, had gained her attention, and she turned her head to listen.

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'We all have to fight,' he went on quietly. 'I have my battles, you have yours. God only knows how hard it is to fight and win; God only knows how easy it is to fight and lose. Still, one defeat does not lose the whole battle, Rose.'

'It does for me! it does for me!'

'It does not, Rose.'

The ring of authority in his voice had its effect, and she choked back a hysterical sob.

'Have you had anything to eat this morning?'

'No, that she hasn't, Mr. Lyon!' said Mother Willett. 'I can't get her to touch anything. See the nice buttered toast spoiling at the fire.'

'Give it to me. Now, Rose, sit up.'

She lifted her head obediently from the cushion and tried to rise, but fell back.

'Never mind,' he said, noting the deadly pallor which overspread her face. 'Give me a couple of pillows, mother.'

The little woman fetched them with alacrity, and he raised the girl and placed them behind her.

'Now,' he said, 'is that comfortable?'

She lifted her eyes to his face, but did not speak.

'Very well. Do you know that you are faint for want of food? Eat this, and you will be better.'

She took the toast mutely, and began to eat.

'Will you promise me to do just what Mother Willett wishes you to?' he asked, after watching her for a minute. 'I am late this morning and must go, but I will call again this evening. Will you promise to be here?'

'Yes, sir,' was the low reply.

'And you will do all that Mother wishes you to?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I think the best thing you can do, Mother, is to put her into bed, and let her sleep. She is worn out. Nancy, what are you going to do?'

'Nothing,' said Nancy, flippantly. But she was evidently ill at ease, and looked furtively at the door.

'Then I will give you something to do. I want you to stay with Rose to-day, will you?'

'What, all day?' she grumbled.

Making a sign for her to follow him, he went out. 'Not all day,' he answered, 'but the greater part of it. She is ill and may grow worse; I do not wish her to be left.'

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'What, really ill? a fever, or summut of that sort do you mean?' asked Nancy.

'I don't know; it may be. Now you see she must not be left, and Mother has so many things to do; haven't you, Mother?'

'Not so many but I can keep my eye on her every now and then, sir.'

'Ah, yes; but I want someone with her all the time; in the room, you know. Now, Nancy, can I trust you?'

He looked at her keenly, kindly, and her eyes fell. Somewhat reluctantly she promised, knowing all the time that it meant imprisonment for herself. 'And s'pose it turns out summut infectious?' she muttered.

'It won't be infectious before night. If she is not better then, I shall fetch a doctor. Are you afraid?'

But Nancy scouted the idea indignantly. ''Taint for myself; but if she's going to have a fever, she might as well ha' jumped into the river, and saved all bother,' she said, philosophically.

Lyon took no notice, but walked away. It was late and he had to hurry, for punctuality was one of his strictest rules.

He called again in the evening, on his way home, and found Nancy still at her post. Rose was sleeping quietly, and her face looked less haggard and worn.

'Poor lamb!' said Mother Willett, softly. 'She isn't one of your brazen hussies, like——' She stopped in confusion, remembering Nancy's presence, and fearful of saying anything that might possibly be construed into a personal allusion. But she need not have been anxious to spare her feelings, for the girl caught up her words with the utmost coolness.

'Like me,' she said. 'Go ahead, Mother Willett, I'm used to being called a brazen hussy. It's no odds.'

'No, my dear, I'm sure I didn't mean you,' said the little woman, distressed. 'I'm sure you've a good heart, or you wouldn't ha' stayed here all day. I only wish you'd be as kind to yourself as you've been to Rose.'

'If I'd been really kind I'd ha' let her alone last night,' replied Nancy, with a sudden flash of bitterness. She went out of the room, and Mother Willett turned to Lyon.

'She's got some good in her, Mr. John.'

'Good!' he repeated absently. 'One spark of the divine left. I sometimes wonder if it ever goes quite out.'

He went out without another word. Curious moods of

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silence were wont to fall upon him, and Mother Willett knew them well.

She went to the door and watched him down the street. 'There he goes, a king's son if ever there was one!' she murmured, her face beaming with loving pride. 'I'll warrant me if there is a spark of the divine, as he called it, he's the one to find it out. And to think he calls me mother!'

That was the climax. She had no children of her own, and to hear this big, stalwart man call her 'Mother' gave the finishing touch to her contented happiness. Everybody loved Mother Willett, but no one had called her mother till John Lyon had done so, and then it seemed so natural that they did it almost unconsciously. She was such a motherly little woman, so full of sympathy, and so helpful. Was a baby born in the neighbourhood? Mother Willett must come and see it, and give her opinion that it was the finest child that ever was born;—or if it were not, that it had some feature nicer than any other baby's. Was any one hurt? Go and fetch Mother Willett with her plaster and bandages. Why, she knew almost as much as the doctor;—some people privately thought, more. She went back to her patient, and found her awake.

'Who was that?' she asked, eagerly. 'Was it him, him as sent me here?'

'Yes, my dear; it was Mr. Lyon. Now don't 'ee begin to talk, there's a dear.'

'But I want to know who he is; is he a clergyman?'

'He! not he, my dear. He's just John Lyon, a good man, and one as gets his orders straight away from heaven, I do believe.'

Rose turned her head wearily on the pillow, and only herself and one other heard the moan, 'He said *she* wanted me up there. Oh, mother! mother!'

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CHAPTER III.

'I NEVER TAKE IT.'

ROOMS tell tales of their occupants, and John Lyon's was no exception to this rule. The furniture was dark and massive, and quaintly carved. His landlady might well call him Jack-of-all-trades, though she could not add, master of none, for all the elaborate carving, the curious little heads peeping out from clusters of vine-leaves on legs and arms of chairs, the delicate flowers and fruits encircling the pillars of the fanciful bookcase, and sideboard, and escritoire were his own handiwork, and worthy a place in any old family mansion. The books on the shelves were a motley multitude, all of them bearing on their backs the unmistakable badge of 'bought second-hand.' There was no carpet on the floor, which, like the furniture, was stained dark brown. A rug of crimson rags lay before the fire, contrasting pleasantly with its surroundings. A gift of gratitude that rug had been, and Lyon prized it for the sake of the feeble fingers whose last earthly work had been wrought with such patient love for him. When he had unfolded it and marked its effect, his keen eye had detected a hitherto undiscovered need in the undraped window, and he had straightway bought curtains of the same warm hue; which proceeding was, he sometimes said, his first and last extravagance. Between the curtains stood a carved stand, full of spreading ferns. They were only common ones, such as he had rooted up on those rare occasions when he went for a day into the country; but he understood how to manage them, and they flourished luxuriantly under his care.

He had brought home some pressing work, and hastily despatching tea, he sat down. At nine o'clock Gower had promised to be there, and he hoped by then to have finished. He wrote the last word as the clock struck, but there was no footstep in the quiet street. It was raining again, but he

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knew that would be no obstacle, and taking up a book waited patiently. Half-past nine; ten. It was no use waiting any longer, and with a sigh he put on his coat and hat and went

It was more than a week before he saw Gower again, though he looked for him in such places as he was likely to frequent. One night someone told him that Gentleman Gower had had a run of luck, and was back in his old lodgings. Lyon knew the house well, and went there at once, not so much hoping to see him as to hear something of him. As he expected, the room was empty, and he went downstairs and knocked at the door below. A brisk voice called 'Come in,' and a tiny little maiden of three toddled to the door and opened it. Lyon took her up in his arms; he was evidently a welcome visitor.

'Well, Mrs. Ripon,' he said advancing into the room, 'how goes the world with you?'

'Thank you, sir, about as even as usual. We haven't seen you this long time, Mr. Lyon; began to think you was forgetting us,' and the merry-looking little woman laughed as if she had said something very comical.

Lyon smiled. 'I don't so easily forget my friends, you see; I have been ill. But who is this young lady?'

A child of most unusual loveliness was sitting on the floor playing with some scraps of coloured paper. Her features were perfect in their delicate, childish beauty, and the fair silken hair fell in wavy masses over the plump, white shoulders. She was looking up in Lyon's face with the grave expression so often seen in the eyes of little children, and he put out his hand invitingly.

'See, I have another knee; will you come?'

She rose at once, without the slightest shyness, and came to him, putting her little hand in his.

'Is she a neighbour's child?' he asked, wondering to see such a rare type of childish beauty there.

'I don't know whose child she is, sir; I'd like to know. She's no poor woman's child, that I'll be bound! you don't see such skin and eyes as them among poor folks' children. Look at her beside my Katie; there's a difference! Why it's like a geranium beside a stock. My Katie's pretty, but she can't touch t'other one.'

'How comes she here?' said Lyon, turning up the child's

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face and looking down into the large blue eyes with unusual interest.

'I found her outside, one evening, sir. She was crying and said a man brought her; but she's too little to talk, bless her. Tell the gentleman your name, baby.'

'Thybil,' lisped the child.

'There! did you ever hear such an outlandish name in your life, Mr. Lyon? She won't say nothing but that. I never heard such a word! Thybil indeed! I just call her baby.'

'She means Sybil,' said Lyon. 'Is your name Sybil, little one? Sybil what?'

'She don't know any other name, sir. There was this paper stuck on to her frock, and a sovereign was tied in a little bag round her neck. It's a man's writing.'

'Will Mrs. Ripon take charge of a motherless child? If so she shall never suffer for doing an act of charity and kindness.'

Lyon turned the paper over; it was part of an old envelope evidently, but there was no other writing on it.

'And you have no idea who the man was?'

'Not a notion. It was dark and no one saw him except some children, and they never noticed him particular. She and my Katie play together like two little lambs, bless their little hearts.'

'But it will be a heavy burden, Mrs. Ripon. How will you manage as she grows older if no supplies come?'

'I don't like to look for'ard, sir; if she must go she must, but it'll go hard with me before I let her go to the House,' replied the woman, reluctantly.

'Well, perhaps you will receive the supplies regularly. Take care of that scrap of paper.'

'Will you keep it for me, sir? I'm so 'fraid it'll get lost. Father, he catches hold of every scrap of paper he sets eyes on.'

'How is he? Much the same, I suppose.'

'Yes, sir; only blinder and blinder. It's as much as he can do to read them blessed advertisements with his nose right on the paper. I'm 'fraid every day he'll be brought home run over. Here, he's coming now.'

A feeble step was heard coming up the stairs, and, slipping off Lyon's knee, Katie ran to open the door,

'Grandfather, here's Mr. Lyon.'

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There was a pause on the landing, and they heard a mutter, 'Mr. Lyon, Mr. Lyon!'

'Come, come, father,' called Mrs. Ripon, 'you remember Mr. Lyon, surely.'

'Oh yes, oh yes, Mr. Lyon; I remember now. He has brought some papers perhaps;' and a queer little old man, bent nearly double, and with long white hair touching his coat collar, came eagerly forward.

'To be sure! I'd almost forgotten them,' said Lyon, putting his hand into his pocket and drawing out a couple of papers.

'There they are, daddy; a *Telegraph* and a *Daily News*.'

The old man seized them with a chuckle of delight. 'Six papers to-day!' he muttered. 'Six papers to-day! That's the way; that's the way! We'll soon be rich now!'

'Where have you been, father?' asked his daughter.

'Not very far, my dear; only for a little walk,' he answered cautiously.

'Oh come, father, what's the use of talking like that before Mr. Lyon; he'll never tell.'

For a moment the old man looked disconcerted, and Lyon spoke reassuringly.

'What success have you had to-day, daddy?'

'A *Globe*, a *Standard*, an *Echo*, and a *Monetary Gazette!*' was the triumphant reply. 'Yesterday I only got a *Times*.'

'And how about the Prospectus over at Blackfriars, father?'

The old man's face clouded. 'They wouldn't give it me,' he said in a crestfallen tone. 'They turned me out.'

'Well, never mind, father; you'll do better another time, and I'm sure you've done splendidly to-day, ain't he, Mr. Lyon?'

'Capitally,' replied Lyon rising. 'I will keep the paper safely, Mrs. Ripon, and mind you let me know if you hear anything more. I came here this evening hoping to see a fellow-lodger of yours; Mr. Gower; but he's out.'

'Him what lodges over us; bless you, sir, he's always out nearly! He'll come home dead drunk about twelve, I expect.'

'Do you know anything about him?'

'Only that he's seen better days; that a blind man can tell; but he does drink to that degree, sir! Well there, he's been drunk every night since he came, and that's a week ago to-day.'

'Where does he get the money?'

'None of us knows, sir. He's got some now, but he'll soon

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drink it all, and then he'll turn out like he did before. Say good-bye to Mr. Lyon, baby.'

'What do you mean by "like he did before"?'

'Like he did when he lodged here before, I mean, sir. He used to lodge here some months ago, but he had to turn out.'

Lyon went out, leaving the children happy in the possession of two bright new pennies. It was a clear, bright night, and he had a long way to go. Mounting an omnibus he rode to the Angel at Islington and there alighted. There was the usual crowd and bustle and confusion round the tavern doors. Omnibuses passing and stopping, tram bells jingling, newsboys and flower-girls besieging the passers-by, and deafening the ear with their shouts. The gas shone brightly overhead, making the corner round the tavern as light as day, and revealing curious studies of human nature in the ever-moving crowd. The sight was an old one, but possessed a never-failing interest, and he paused on the curb-stone. A number of boys were coming across the street, closely following a policeman who carried in his arms a lad apparently about ten years old. Catching a glimpse of the child's face, Lyon started forward with a suppressed exclamation.

'Poor little fellow! is it an accident?' asked a voice by his side.

'The accident of circumstance,' he answered, sadly.

'I do not understand you. I asked you if the little boy had met with an accident,' said the voice mildly, and then Lyon turned and looked at its owner. He was an elderly man, with a refined gentle face and grey hair. A girl, his daughter evidently, hung upon his arm watching the scene before her with an absorbed interest and curiosity, which showed that it was a new and strange one to her.

'I beg your pardon; the boy was drunk,' said Lyon.

'Drunk! that little child!' exclaimed the old gentleman in indignant horror, while his daughter turned with incredulous face.

'Yes, that little child; and the sin and the shame lie not so much with him as with others.'

'But who could be so wicked as to give him drink?'

'He had money to pay for it.'

'And that makes it worse,' said the old gentleman, sharply. 'I'd put the rascal who sold him the drink in prison for twenty years if I had my will. What our legislature is

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thinking of to allow such wickedness, is a mystery to me! Come, my dear.'

He turned away quickly, and happening to put his foot on a piece of orange peel, slipped and fell heavily forward. Lyon picked him up, but he could not put his foot to the ground.

'It is sprained, I think,' he said, the compressed lips and drawn forehead showing the effort it cost him to repress an exclamation of pain.

'Oh papa, don't try to walk! it will only hurt you,' said his daughter, as he again attempted to move.

'It is no use trying, my dear.—I fear I must ask you to call a cab, if you will be so kind,' he added to Lyon. 'It is very awkward, very unpleasant, I never did such a thing in my life before. Alison, can you see a cab?'

He spoke impatiently, for the accident had attracted the attention of the bystanders, and he did not like his position. Lyon saw the annoyance in his face, and beckoning a policeman, sent him for a cab. In a few moments one drew up, and he lifted the old man in and placed his foot comfortably on the opposite seat.

'Will you tell him where to drive, please?' said the girl, gratefully, as he shut the door.

It was a sweet voice, and for the first time Lyon looked at her face. It was not pretty and yet it was attractive; there was a refined, delicate look on it, and the large blue eyes were so full of unspoken thanks, that he smiled down into them in spite of his preoccupation.

'Now, I wonder how they'll get the old gentleman out,' he thought, as he turned to the driver. 'If there are only a parcel of girls they won't know what to do.'

He hesitated, for he had some important work to do that evening. But John Lyon was apt to make the need of the moment the law of the moment, and the next minute he was on the box. He was glad he went when he saw the relief on the old gentleman's face when he opened the door.

'Oh dear, how good of you to come. I was anticipating a species of torture at the hands of the cabman,' he said, trying to move. 'I had no idea you were on the box.'

But gentle as Lyon was he could not help causing pain as he lifted him up the steps into the house.

'I am afraid it is more than a sprain,' he said, sinking back

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on the couch; 'the least movement hurts it. Don't go, pray don't go, Mr.——'

'My name is Lyon.'

'Lyon! Any relation to the Lyons of Hertfordshire? I knew Gilbert Lyon well.'

'There is no relationship that I am aware of. I have no relatives,' said Lyon, briefly.

He had done his duty here and was anxious to go, but he was not allowed.

'Alison, my dear, ring the bell; Mr. Lyon will take a glass of wine. My name is Wycherley, Mr. Lyon; this is my daughter. My dear, I'm afraid you must send for Dr. Lawrence.'

Despite his efforts to appear indifferent, Mr. Wycherley was evidently alarmed at the state of his foot. It was easy to see that he was of a nervous, excitable temperament, unable to bear either physical or mental suffering. His alarm increased when he found he could not take off his boot; he was sure there must be some serious injury; most probably he would lose the use of the foot altogether. Lyon quietly took out his penknife, cut the elastic and released the swollen foot.

'I am something of a doctor,' he said, 'and should recommend arnica and rest. It is quite unnecessary to call in a doctor; still if it will reassure you it can do no harm.'

'Do you really think there is nothing serious the matter?' said Mr. Wycherley doubtfully, anxious to be reassured, yet afraid to trust the opinion of anyone out of the profession.

'Indeed, papa dear, I do not think you need be anxious,' said his daughter gently, 'I know arnica is a splendid thing, and if it does not do you good, Dr. Lawrence shall come.'

'Very well, my dear; I will try it. It is better now. Pray sit down, Mr. Lyon, and Alison, do ring that bell.'

'I have rung, papa. They are coming.'

A servant came in with wine, and Lyon sat down. It was the first time in his life that he had entered a gentleman's drawing-room, but though he was conscious of the subtle influence of the refinement around him, he took in no special feature. He felt out of place, and anxious to get into the free air. Not that he felt any painful consciousness of social inequality and inferiority; there had been nothing whatever to raise the feeling, and he was not accustomed to think much about himself. Mr. Wycherley was indebted to him, and this

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his manner showed; but nothing beyond. He was doubly grateful to him; both for his help and for the unobtrusive way in which he had given it; and with true courtesy he wished to make him understand this without the embarrassment of words.

Lyon was roused by the chink of glasses at his side.

'You will take a glass of wine, Mr. Lyon?'

'Thank you, no,' he replied, somewhat brusquely, and then noting the faint gleam of surprise in Miss Wycherley's face he hastened to add: 'I never take it.' The question was unexpected, for Mr. Wycherley's request to his daughter had not caught his ear. Just for the moment he felt a flash of annoyance, at which he smiled the next minute. How could she know that for the last ten years no drop of wine had touched his lips—that he disliked and condemned its use as a beverage?

'It is a good thing for a young man to be abstemious,' said Mr. Wycherley, composedly sipping his glass of old port. 'They are better without such things, if they would but see it.'

'The difficulty is in determining at what time of life they may begin,' replied Lyon. 'If a man does not acquire the taste in early life he is not likely to do so when he is old. If you lay down a law that young men are not to drink at all, it really amounts to a practical abolition of intoxicating drink.'

'Perhaps you are right; I do not know.'

'I am speaking of the result as a whole; no doubt there would be exceptions.'

'A majority of them, I'm afraid,' said Mr. Wycherley, smiling. 'Wine has a charm for old and young.'

'But habits are formed by the young, and none more so than the habit of drink. You saw a specimen to-night, and by no means an uncommon one.'

'Have you met with many such cases?' asked Mr. Wycherley, settling himself comfortably on the couch and declining any further interference with his foot. 'It is quite easy, my dear,' he said in reply to his daughter's inquiries. 'I think if I rest it awhile it will be better. I won't have it touched.—I am a comparative stranger in London, Mr. Lyon. We have only been here three months, and we came from a little secluded village in Yorkshire, where juvenile intemperance was un-

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known. I am afraid there is more wickedness in the world than we have any idea of.'

'But if you read the papers you must know a great deal of what is going on. The police-court reports are an education.'

'But I never read the police-court reports,' replied Mr. Wycherley hastily. 'I make a point of never even looking at them. There are such painful things in them.'

Lyon was silent. He wondered what sort of a life this man had led, shut up in a Yorkshire village, knowing nothing of life's shoals and quicksands, and closing his eyes to the suffering as well as the sin of his fellow-men.

'You see it can do no good,' continued Mr. Wycherley, construing his silence into a condemnation of what might possibly sound selfish. 'If I could do any good I should be most happy, of course.'

The words had a conventional ring, and Lyon did not answer.

'What good could it do?' said Mr. Wycherley peevishly.

'I do not say any,' replied Lyon. 'I suppose that would depend upon yourself.'

'I do not understand you. How could reading about robberies and crime of all sorts, and working upon one's feelings, do any good?'

'Reading in itself would do no good, but knowledge of existing evil often enables us to put a stop to it. Suppose all thought as you do.'

'But it is some men's business officially.'

'The greater part of the good done in the world is the work of the self-elected workers. I don't believe in official missionaries.'

'But you surely don't think that all men are called upon to work?'

'Do you think that a favoured few are exempt?' replied Lyon.

'I am afraid you are a something of a democrat, Mr. Lyon.'

'No, I am not; not in the general acceptation of the term. What do you mean by it?'

'Why, a—a general leveller,' replied Mr. Wycherley, with a sweep of the hand. 'You evidently think all ought to work in one way or another.'

'For the improvement of our one common nature—certainly I do. As for levelling rank, the idea is absurd. Honour to whom honour is due.'

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Mr. Wycherley looked relieved. 'I was afraid you were one of those dangerous characters who ride a hobby to death,' he said with a smile. 'I always keep them at a safe distance.'

'And yet the only way of insuring success is to persistently follow up an idea,' said Lyon as he rose to leave. 'Mark out your path and then walk in it. Howard was called a man of one idea; he rode a hobby to death.'

'Oh yes, such men are useful, no doubt: they are needed. But we don't want the leaven to run throughout society at large. If a man feels that he is called to a certain work, to advocate a certain cause, let him do it by all means. What I object to is the forcing their ideas upon other people. We cannot all be philanthropists.'

'Cannot or will not? My experience has taught me to doubt the word *cannot*,' said Lyon. 'No word is more misused.'

'You think it is a convenient way of expressing *will not;* a little more polite. Not in this case, I think.'

'I cannot agree with you. I believe every man and woman on earth is bound by law to be a philanthropist.'

'Bound by what law?'

'The law which governs humanity, the law of the Bible. I have seen strange philanthropists in strange places; places so dark that you would expect nothing but sin and wrong-doing in them.'

'It must be very interesting to hear of such things. Alison, my love, do you remember that book your cousin lent you? The shady side, the dark side, the what was it? I forget the title. It was full of interesting incidents of low life in London. Dear me, if you are in any way connected with any of these City missions, Mr. Lyon, pray do not hesitate to make known any particularly distressing cases. I shall be most happy to help as far as lies in my power.'

'And so become in a minor degree a philanthropist,' said Lyon with a smile.

'Ah well,' replied Mr. Wycherley, slightly confused, while his daughter laughed mischievously, 'that is a very harmless philanthropy. May I have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Lyon?'

Lyon hesitated, not quite knowing what to say. He did not wish to come again; he could see no reason why he should do so. Certainly this old gentleman, with his views

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of life and its duties, could have nothing in common with him, and therefore his words must be merely the dictate of conventional politeness. Acting upon this supposition he declined.

'I have no time for visiting,' he said plainly. 'Mine is a busy life.'

'And mine an idle one,' said Mr. Wycherley, trying not to look hurt. 'Will you promise to do as I suggested—make known any distressing case? I do not think you have any right to refuse that.'

'No, I have not,' replied Lyon directly, liking his new acquaintance better for his last words. 'I will not forget.'

It was much too late to keep his engagement, and he turned toward home. As he walked quickly down the Upper Street he saw a small crowd gathered round a new building. Some scaffolding was erected, and clinging to one of the posts was a man, just sober enough to know that if he let go he would fall. A policeman, evidently something of a wit in his way, was talking to him, not for his benefit so much as for the amusement of the lookers-on.

'If you don't come away from there they'll lay you down as a foundation stone,' he said jokingly.

The people laughed and Lyon stood still to listen. The man swayed backward and forward, but did not attempt to move on.

'You won't go? Ah well, every man to his post,' said the policeman turning away.

At that moment the man raised his head; the light of the lamp shone full upon his face and Lyon recognized him. It was Edward Gower.

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CHAPTER IV.

TEMPTED—RESCUED.

THERE was a cab standing near, and Lyon beckoned to the driver. Then he went up to Gower and drew his arm within his own.

'Go away,' said Gower, with drunken inarticulateness.

'I am going to take you home. You don't want to stay here all night, do you?'

'Take me home! that's a good one! The governor would shut the door in my face,' hiccoughed Gower, staggering forward. 'Yes, come along, old fellow: let's go home.'

He subsided into a corner of the cab and did not speak again. On reaching his lodgings, Lyon tried to rouse him, but in vain. He and the cabman had to carry him upstairs and place him on his bed, and leave him to sleep off the effects of the drink.

Before he left, Lyon glanced round the room. The only furniture besides the bedstead and a chair, was an old table, covered with scattered papers. In the dim light of the candle, lent by Mrs. Ripon, they looked like manuscript, but he was not sure.

'If so,' he thought, 'it accounts for his sudden income of money. I suppose he writes and then drinks till he is forced to write again. I wonder what he writes.'

It was impossible to form any idea; he was just the sort of man who might write anything, from a treatise on the correlation of physical forces to a sensational paragraph for a penny paper. There are hundreds of broken-down college men in the courts and alleys of London, who are glad to earn by their pen enough to keep themselves alive. Men, who do not care to what use they put their talent and education if they can but indulge the ever-increasing craving for strong drink.

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Lyon had met such men before frequently enough, but not one had roused in him the interest he felt for Edward Gower, as he called himself, for it was of course an assumed name. He left him, determined to come again the next morning, which he accordingly did. As he mounted the stairs, little Katie Ripon ran out of her mother's room followed by her new playmate.

'Are you going to see the sick man?' she asked, clinging to his arm, as he stooped to her small level.

'What sick man?' he asked.

'Upstairs. Mother's upstairs: she says we must be good and quiet.'

'And that's the way you do it!' said her mother's voice from the upper landing. 'Go in, directly.'

Lyon went up. 'What is the matter?' he asked.

'Nothing but what he ought to expect, sir! Pains in his head and pains in his limbs, and I'll be bound pains in his heart as well! that's sure to come sooner or later, and better the first than the last. I've been bathing his head with vinegar and water, and he says he's better.'

'What made you come up?'

'I heard a great noise and ran up to see what was the matter, and there he was lying on the floor like dead. He tried to walk and fell, you see, Mr. Lyon. Isn't it a pity! and he such a fine young man.'

Sending the talkative little woman downstairs, Lyon went in. Gower was lying on the bed with his face to the wall and did not move. At first he thought he was asleep, but an impatient movement of the head betrayed him.

Taking the solitary chair by the bedside he asked a few professional questions which were briefly and moodily answered.

'A fall is an awkward thing sometimes. You will have to keep quiet, and rest. Mrs. Ripon is a capital nurse.'

'I don't want her to come near me again: tell her to stay away,' said Gower, ungraciously.

'I shall tell her no such thing,' replied Lyon, pleasantly; 'and she wouldn't do it if I did; she looks upon you as her property now, and will nurse you till you are well. It's the way with some women.'

'But I'm not ill. If I could only get rid of this confounded pain in my head.'

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'Which you certainly will not do if you toss about like that. Lie still,' said Lyon, with authority.

Gower turned round and looked at him. 'You are a cool hand!' he said, with a mixture of irritation and amusement. 'Mrs. Ripon says you brought me here last night: where was I?'

'In the Upper Street.'

'Kismet again! I've dodged you about six times this last week, and yet you must needs go to the Upper Street, that one particular night.'

'What have you dodged me for?'

'I will spare your feelings,' was the mocking reply.

'Don't trouble,' said Lyon. 'I dispense with such things on ordinary occasions. I thought you were a man of honour.'

'Who says I am not?'

'I do. Men of honour keep their engagements.'

'What do you know about men of honour?' was the insulting reply.

'That they keep appointments or apologise for not doing so.'

'Do you expect me to apologise?'

'I would rather you kept your engagement,' said Lyon, with no further notice of the sneer than a slight smile, which Gower's quick eyes did not fail to detect.

'What have you come here for? It is a strange thing I cannot keep my own room to myself,' he said, petulantly.

Lyon made no reply, but rose and went to the door, returning with a bottle and a glass.

'I do not wish to intrude,' he said. 'I came to see how you were getting on after last night, and like a good doctor, ordered my prescription to be made up and sent in.'

'What is it?' asked Gower, suspiciously, seeing the glass but not the bottle. 'I'm not going to take any of your confounded messes.'

'It isn't very pleasant certainly,' replied Lyon. 'I am not particularly fond of soda water myself.

'Soda water! Umph.'

It was a sort of medicine he was evidently pretty well accustomed to, and he drank it off without a word, only making a wry face at its lack of the usual flavour.

'Now,' said Lyon, 'I will wish you good morning.'

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Taking his hat he walked to the door, but Gower called after him.

'One moment, Lyon.'

Surprised at the change of tone, he stopped.

'I was a brute to speak as I did. Put it down to the score of this wretched headache and forget it. I'll call at your crib to-night if you're at liberty.'

'All right: at nine o'clock;' and then Lyon went out, feeling it wiser not to press the matter closer. If Gower came of his own free will, well and good: if not—well, if he did not come of his free will he would not come at all, that was certain.

But he felt sure he should see him; there seemed no reason why he should not break the engagement as he had done before, and yet he felt persuaded he would come, and this time he was not mistaken. It was nine when he went home, and on entering his room saw someone sitting in his arm-chair before the fire.

'First at the tryst to-night,' said Gower's voice. 'For this let my sins be forgiven.'

He looked wretchedly ill, as Lyon saw when he lighted the gas. His hands trembled and he could steady them only by holding the arms of the chair, and his face was haggard and worn; all strength seemed to have gone out of him.

'This is a pleasant state of things, isn't it?' he said. 'That fall gave the finishing touch, and I was just ready for it. I've been going it rather hard this week.'

'Have you come to a standstill now?' asked Lyon, drawing up a chair.

'Yes, because it's a case of a threepenny-bit again,' replied Gower. 'How about the Greek?'

'Never mind the Greek to-night. You are not up to it, and I don't feel much disposed to tax my brains.'

'I feel as if I had none to tax, but that is easily accounted for. I must pay the price.'

'It's a pretty long one, taking one thing with another,' said Lyon.

'Longer than you know,' replied Gower, moodily. 'It can't go on for ever, that's one comfort.'

'Poor comfort, unless the end brings restitution.'

'Restitution of what?' demanded Gower, sharply, with a look of suspicion.

'Of all that has been lost. Health, for one thing.'

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'I didn't mean that sort of end. I meant the one great end of all things.'

'Always supposing that there is an end of all things.'

For some minutes Gower was silent.

'Some things once lost cannot be restored,' he said suddenly. 'What is the use of talking about restitution?'

'I'm rather an advocate for talking,' said Lyon, with a smile. 'My experience has taught me to regard a good talk as a good help.'

Gower shrugged his shoulders. 'That's part of a woman's creed, isn't it?'

'And of a man's, to judge by facts. A man rarely does any deed of importance, be it good or bad, without talking it over first. Of course I mean the majority of men: there are many exceptions.'

'One of which I should take you to be.'

'Why?'

'You don't look the sort of man to make indiscriminate confidences: you know too much of life to trust anyone.'

'I have trusted many.'

'And proved them trustworthy?' said Gower, maliciously.

Lyon laughed. 'Unfortunately, no,' he replied frankly. 'I have been deceived as often as most, I suppose; I am wiser now and expect less. Youth is the time for golden visions of universal honour and truth.'

'And manhood is the time for the dissipation of those said visions.'

'And for the finding of the truth,' said Lyon, quietly.

'Exactly, and it doesn't take long to find.'

'Have you found it?' asked Lyon.

'If you can call it *finding* when a conclusion is forced upon you, whether you will or not.'

'What is that conclusion?'

'All men are liars,' said Gower, grimly: 'and I've good authority for saying so.'

'But that was not an enforced conclusion; it was said in haste in the instance you are quoting.'

'Who did say it? It's in the Bible, isn't it?'

'David said it.'

'Well, he knew what he was about: he did not say it in haste.'

'We have his own word for it that he did.'

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Gower looked sceptical, but made no reply, and Lyon turned the conversation into another channel. His interest in his newly-found acquaintance was increasing, and he was anxious to say nothing that would rouse the suspicion that he had any design in seeking him, beyond that of ordinary friendship. He had seen enough of the world to know that there is scarcely anything men resent more than an attempt to *reform them*, as they sneeringly call it. Show them your hand and the game is lost.

They discussed politics, as men generally do, and argued themselves into sociality and friendliness. They seemed to suit each other, these two men who had thus with apparent inadvertence crossed each other's path, and it was with evident reluctance that Gower rose to leave.

'How is your *protégée?*' he asked. 'I have seen Nancy, but not Rose. Is she with Mother Willett?'

'Yes; and likely to remain there for a time, I'm afraid: she is ill.'

'Nervous prostration, and all that sort of thing, I suppose. Best thing for her if she died: she'd be out of it all then, poor girl.'

'I don't want her to be out of it yet,' said Lyon. 'I am not sure that it would be good generalship. Do you play chess?'

'I used to. It is long since I had a game.'

'What are your tactics when you find the game going against you? Suppose you have lost some of your best pieces and your queen is pretty well hemmed in, what then?'

'It depends. If on glancing ahead I see the game is up, why then I give in and clear the board; but if there is one chance I make the most of it.'

'Exactly, and that is what I mean Rose to do if possible. I am no advocate for a flight; I believe in fighting to the last.'

'What a curious fellow you are,' said Gower; they had left the house and were walking down the street. 'What business is it of yours to take up these solitary lives and make their interests your own? If you were one of those preaching fellows I could understand it; but you give their religions a wide berth.'

'I don't give all religions a wide berth,' said Lyon.

'Have you invented one of your own?'

'No; I am trying an imitation at present. I think I have

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found one that will do, and I'm working it out to see if it will act.'

'An imitation? It has been tried then?'

'Is there anything new under the sun? Yes, it has been tried, I believe.'

'What are its first principles?' asked Gower, with some curiosity.

'Look after number one; that is *the* first principle.'

'I think that religion would suit most people.'

'So do I,' replied Lyon, dryly.

'You are inconsistent: you don't follow out the rules of your own acknowledged religion; just the reverse. Rose isn't number one; neither was I, the first night of our acquaintance.'

'Excuse me; can you prove the inconsistency? How do you know that I have not already taken care of number one?'

'You are not keeping Rose at Mother Willett's without considerable expense,' continued Gower, ignoring the interruption. 'You are not rich, and cannot afford to do these things; and yet you do them and then talk of taking care of number one.'

'As a first principle, yes. The second is another thing.'

'What is it?'

'Precisely what you accuse me of putting in the place of the first.'

'It is all a mystery to me; I'll puzzle it out some day. As for this second principle, which seems to occupy you chiefly, it is flourishing in my part of the world. A woman lodging under me has adopted a little wee waif, a nobody's child, and is bringing it up with her own, though it is as much as ever she can do to keep the wolf from the door as it is.'

'But there is a promise that remittances will be sent,' said Lyon.

'And does she believe it?' asked Gower, contemptuously. 'A baby wouldn't believe that tale! she'd better by far send the child to the workhouse.'

'Mrs. Ripon is making a good investment,' replied Lyon.

'If the child turns out well.'

'No matter what becomes of the child.'

'Well, it is to be hoped the remittances will come,' said Gower, looking bored. 'Have you such a thing handy as a spare half-crown? I'll pay you to-morrow.'

Lyon looked at him in astonishment; the man had under-

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gone a sudden and strange metamorphosis. His face was drawn and marked with lines of strongly repressed emotion, and his eyes shone with a brilliancy which told of intense excitement.

'Have you got half-a-crown?' he repeated eagerly, laying his hand on Lyon's arm. 'Say a shilling, then! I'll pay you back; upon my word of honour as a gentleman, I will!'

They stood within sight of a tavern; there was the usual light, there were the usual fatal attractions, and in a moment Lyon comprehended the situation. He bitterly regretted he had not foreseen the danger and gone round some other way; but there was no way by which he could have avoided passing one or more of these fatal spots; they abounded there, as in most parts of London.

'Surely you have a shilling,' continued Gower, shivering with excitement. 'I'll pay you interest for it, cent. per cent., will that do?'

'I cannot lend you one now. You don't want to buy anything to-night; the shops are shut.'

Gower's fingers tightened round his arm. 'Do you mean that you won't lend me one?' he whispered. 'I tell you I must have one! I'm dying with thirst. Do you know what it is to be consumed with a raging maddening thirst? Do you know what it is to feel that your reason depends upon one drink? If so, by the recollection of it lend me that one shilling.'

'And what will be the result? A temporary madness, Gower; think what you are doing, think of the past,' said Lyon, vainly trying to touch some answering chord. But he was speaking to a madman.

'My past! what of it? what do you know or care about my lost past! If you don't lend me that shilling may——'

'Stop!' exclaimed Lyon, laying his hand heavily on his shoulder. He paused and they stood looking at each other in silence.

'I will lend you ten or twenty shillings if you will promise one thing,' continued Lyon at last.

'Promise what?'

'That not one of them shall be spent in any way that can bring harm to you, morally or physically. Will you promise that?'

'Promise a lie!' retorted Gower, furiously. 'You know

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it will do me harm! you know it is killing me,—and what is it to you if it does?'

'I do not choose to hammer a nail in any man's coffin. Have you not moral courage enough to face danger, to dare the enemy? You are a coward, Edward Gower.'

'You say that with impunity to me! You would not dare to say it to an equal in strength. It is you who are the coward!' panted Gower, turning from him.

The tavern doors opened, and a number of men and women came out. As they came out Gower pushed past them and went in, Lyon after him.

It was late, and most of the frequenters of the place were gone; only a few late drinkers who could not tear themselves away from their god were there. Pushing by a woman Gower pulled off his coat. 'Here!' he cried recklessly, 'how much of the divine elixir will you give for that?' and he tossed it across the counter.

The man caught it, and with an oath flung it back.

'Take your rubbish to a pawnshop,' he said angrily. 'We don't buy rags.'

'No, you buy souls! Look out, my fine fellow! there'll be a reckoning day for you. How many times have I emptied my pockets into your till?'

'Stop that,' shouted the man. 'He's drunk; turn him out.'

One of the men advanced to obey, but before he could raise his hand he was lying full length on the floor. The place was in an uproar in a minute, and while one shouted for the police, and another shouted for a free fight, Lyon seized Gower by the arm and dragged him by main force out of the house. At the corner he stopped.

'Put your coat on,' he said. 'We shall be stopped.'

'I'm not going to put it on; I'm going to pawn it,' replied Gower, recklessly.

'You had better put it on. Do you want to spend the night in prison?' said Lyon rapidly, seeing a policeman's helmet looming in sight.

'I don't care where I spend it so that I can get a glass of brandy!'

It was no use arguing with him; he was past that, and it was with a feeling of relief that Lyon recognised the policeman.

'Here, Willis, I want you,' he said, and the man lifted his lamp.

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LYON SEIZED GOWER BY THE ARM, AND DRAGGED HIM BY MAIN FORCE OUT OF THE HOUSE.'—*See p.* 40.

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'Mr. Lyon! All right, sir. Drunk?'

'No; don't talk but act. Bring him along.'

A crowd was collecting, and Lyon was anxious to get away with no further outbreak on Gower's part. Taking one arm and the policeman the other, they hurried him off and he offered no resistance. He walked like a man in a dream.

'Is he ill, sir?' asked Willis, respectfully.

'I am afraid so. We must get him home,' said Lyon, not liking this sudden acquiescence.

They got him in and upstairs with the aid of Mrs. Ripon's candle. Once in his own room he seemed to recover and looked up suspiciously.

'What are you going to do with me?'

'Only put you on the bed, and you may sleep till morning, sir,' replied Willis. 'You'll be all right after a sleep.'

The brief madness was over, and Lyon could scarcely believe it had ever been. Gower spoke quietly and rationally, and looked himself again; but he was exhausted by his recent excitement. He wished Lyon good-night, and this time shook hands.

'I'll see you again soon,' he said, and then noticing his doubtful manner, laughed, 'Don't be afraid, I'm all right now. "Richard's himself again." I was a fool just now, but for the life of me I couldn't help it. The sight of the place made me mad.'

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CHAPTER V.

THE VOW REGISTERED.

FOR the next few weeks Gower was confined to his bed. With what seemed marvellous forethought in such a character, he had paid his landlady a month in advance, as Lyon discovered on applying to her. But for this he must have gone to the hospital, as he was entirely friendless.

'I haven't a friend in London,' he said in reply to Lyon's question. 'There is one in the world who would help me gladly if she knew; but I'd rather starve to death than let her know.' He turned away his face, and did not speak again; the words had evidently awakened painful memories.

Lyon sat watching him, wondering what story he could tell if he chose. One of suffering for himself and others, no doubt; and with as little doubt, of error and sin: the former is generally the result of the latter. Was she of whom he spoke his wife? More than once in his sleep he had murmured a name, coupling with it terms of endearment; but in his waking hours he was reserved and reticent, making no allusion to his own past.

Lyon was with him as much as possible, and Mrs. Ripon, with the usual large-heartedness and generosity of the poor, gave up much of her time to him. A dozen times a day she toiled up the steep stairs to see if he wanted anything, to shake up his pillow, or give him a cooling drink. In the evening Lyon came and stayed as long as he could, and the long quiet hours of companionship and converse at last had their effect.

Some men repel confidence, some compel it. Looking in the face of one man while talking to him, you think 'your presence is sufficient to seal my lips;' looking at another, you grow confidential, tell him your thoughts and feelings, expect and *receive* sympathy. It is a curious thing, this mental affinity. In his wanderings Edward Gower had met with hundreds of

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men, good, bad, and indifferent, and yet for the first time in his later life he found himself talking of himself. One reason perhaps was that he thought much about himself. Long lonely hours of sickness are apt to turn the thoughts inward, and what the heart thinks the tongue is equally apt to speak.

So Lyon learned much of his past life. Learned that he had gone through a college career with *eclât*, and taken a high position on the list of Wranglers; that he had commenced life as a barrister, full of bright anticipations and glowing hopes; that the gay world had kept open house for him and welcomed him into its charmed circle. And then came a stop, a gap, and the altered present. What had brought about the change he did not say; but Lyon thought he knew.

'Do you keep a debtor and creditor account?' asked Gower abruptly one evening.

'In some cases, yes.'

'Have you in mine?'

'No.'

'How do you know I shall ever pay you?'

'I cannot tell *how* I know; I feel an inward persuasion,' replied Lyon, smiling. 'You are not the sort to remain under a pecuniary obligation long; you have too much pride.'

'Pride!' echoed Gower bitterly, 'I'm a nice one to have any pride! I have not a penny in the world, and not much more than a penny's worth.'

'You have the worth of a fortune,' replied Lyon.

'Where?'

Lyon touched his head.

'My brain, you mean. Ah well, it is my only hope. You are right as far as the money part of the obligation goes, Lyon; I will pay you as soon as I can get about. You are a mystery to me. You tell me yourself you are only a foreman or something of that sort, in a printing house, and that your salary is small. Then how do you manage to give away all you do?'

He had long wished to ask the question, for it had puzzled him. Mrs. Ripon had enlightened him as to the nature of Lyon's work among the poor, and he could not reconcile the fact of his poverty with that of his generosity.

'The only conclusion I can arrive at is that you are an alchemist and have found out the great secret,' he continued. 'Come, confess.'

'It is a secret, inasmuch that only one or two know. I

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will tell you willingly, especially as I want to enlist your aid!' replied Lyon. 'You wondered at my wishing to read Greek.'

'No, I didn't,' interrupted Gower, 'I thought it was merely an excuse of yours to find me something to do. I credited you with good motives, you see.'

'But they happened to be wrong. I really was, and am, anxious to read it up with someone who can help me. The fact is, I am writing a series of articles for a magazine, and my ignorance of Greek hampers me. Of course I might find all I want in translations, but that does not suit me! I prefer going to the fountain-head for water.'

'Oh, oh!' said Gower, 'that is it, is it? Comrade, I salute thee. Do you see those papers peeping out from that bag? Those are uncorrected proofs, sent in the day you found me in Islington. We are in the same line of business, friend Lyon.'

'I thought as much. Why didn't you let me correct the proofs? What are they?'

'It is too late now; never mind them, I have an order on hand I know, but what it is I cannot make out. My memory is failing me.'

'What class of thing is it? Essay, poetry, fact or fiction?'

Gower burst into a fit of laughter. 'I remember!' he said at last. 'I'm afraid you will be horrified.'

'I'm not easily horrified.'

'Well, I have a standing order for half-a-dozen sermons, on the text "Be sure your sin will find you out"! What do you think of that?'

'Umph! well, you might do worse than write sermons.'

'And parsons might do worse than preach them,' rejoined Gower coolly. 'Do you know what the text is apropos of?'

'No.'

'This poisoning case that is occupying the public mind. I am to wait and see how the verdict is likely to go, and sermonise accordingly; throw in a few touches from nature, you see. They'll go like wildfire as soon as the trial is over. If I can't manage it in time will you take it up?'

'No, thank you,' said Lyon, with supreme contempt. 'I do not choose to encourage imposture.'

'But what are the poor beggars to do if they can't make their own sermons?' demanded Gower, good-humouredly. 'I

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think it's a fair division; I write and they preach, only we don't share the proceeds; that is not fair.'

'What do you get for a sermon?'

'Half-a-guinea each, the special ones; prices vary,' replied Gower, enjoying Lyon's face. 'Bless you, man, I write better sermons than half the parsons.'

'That is not saying much, perhaps,' said Lyon dryly.

'Doesn't it suit your principles?'

'Certainly not,' was the emphatic reply.

'And yet I am only taking care of number one.'

'It is not taking care of number one to lower and debase it.'

Gower opened his eyes. 'Lowering and debasing to write sermons! I thought you'd be delighted to find my employment so praiseworthy and innocent.'

'It is neither praiseworthy nor innocent to aid a deception. When did you write the last?'

'I wrote a couple the day I engaged to come to you. I was hard up and was obliged to do something.'

'So you wrote sermons and got drunk on the money.'

'Exactly. You have the virtue of plain speech, my friend, and do not trouble to cloak your pleasant sayings.'

'What is the use? you would know what I meant. You did get drunk.'

Gower's face flushed, and Lyon, who was watching him narrowly, turned away satisfied. The apparent rough plainness of his language was not without motive. He knew now that Gower was not lost to every sense of shame; his self-respect could still be touched, and seeing this he took hope.

'And so you are an author?' said Gower, after a pause. 'What have you written? I should like to read your works. Who was it that said a man put himself into his books? I shall be able to catch a glimpse of you, perhaps, in yours.'

'Haven't you caught a glimpse of me yet? You ought to have done more than that by this time.'

'Why, man, I know absolutely nothing about you,' exclaimed Gower. 'Your name and business, perhaps, and just a little of your nature, but only a fraction of the whole. For aught I know you may be the Caliph of Bagdad in disguise, or a——'

'Wandering earl,' put in Lyon. 'Don't let your imagination run riot; I am what I seem to be, and nothing more. Something like you in one respect, I have no relatives or

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friends. That is to say friends of my own stamp; otherwise I have plenty.'

'I wonder what you call your stamp. Why don't you get married?'

Lyon gazed at him for a moment in astonishment, then broke into an amused laugh. 'My dear fellow, whatever put such an idea into your head?'

'Well, why don't you?' repeated Gower, with a half-boyish persistency and laughing familiarity. He looked so young and so handsome in the flickering firelight, so far removed from the degraded drunkard of the past, that Lyon could scarcely believe they were the same.

'I have no time.'

'No time to get married! that's good.'

'No time to look for a wife. If I came across one accidentally, well and good; but I can't act Cœlebs in search of a wife over again.'

'If I come across a Lucilla, I'll send her to you.'

'Better keep her yourself.'

A sudden change came over Gower's face. 'I shall never marry,' he said hurriedly, and then added bitterly, 'Who would have a penniless outcast?'

'No one in their senses; but many might be glad to have Edward Gower, the clever, intellectual, well-to-do barrister. Why don't you do it, Gower?'

'What?'

'Quit all this,' said Lyon, with a sweep of his hand; 'cast the past behind you for ever. Win back your old position and standing, and dare any man to despise you. Why should you lose your place among honourable men? Look at yourself; young, handsome, clever, educated, with everything in your favour, why should you not take your place with your equals? What are you staying in a garret for, herding with low, drunken blackguards, who are not fit to enter a decent house?'

'Because I can't help myself,' replied Gower, his face flushing and his eyes gleaming with sudden excitement. 'Do you think I have fallen to this without a struggle? Do you think it is of my own free will I am here, living on charity? Would I choose this garret? And yet you coolly tell me to leave it all and go back. I tell you my past is dead.'

'Then let the dead past bury its dead!' cried Lyon, im-

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petuously, rising, and pacing the floor. 'Begin with the present, and work out the problem afresh. You began wrong; now begin right, and you will solve it.'

'I have solved it—*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.* Life is not worth the trouble of living.'

'Place a starving man before a casket,' said Lyon, standing before him; 'tell him there is bread in the casket, and give him the key. He flings the key from him, saying, "*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*"'

'He's a philosopher or a fool.'

'And here are you. What is life but the key to our casket? What is it that every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth craves? Happiness! and it is in the casket. Yet, with the key in your hand, you say, "*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*" Are you a fool or a philosopher?'

'How do I know the casket contains happiness?'

'What more do you want than the testimony of thousands?'

'What may be happiness for them may not be happiness for me.'

'All men are not constituted alike, yet if they are hungry, they will eat.'

'But they won't choose the same sort of food,' retorted Gower.

'Neither does the casket contain only one sort of happiness. Every one gets what suits him. Now, leaving sentiment, conjecture, and religion out of the question altogether, and taking only an ordinary, common-place, common-sense, business view of the whole thing: Which life is the happier, that of the man who has a fair share of luxuries, companionship with talented educated men, the respect of all who know him, the love of wife and children, and an honourable name; or the life of him who sinks into poverty, wretchedness, privation, who loses home, kindred and friends, and wanders a vagabond and an outcast on the earth?'

'And finally dies and is buried,' continued Gower, with assumed *sang froid.* 'Your question answers itself.'

'And yet you deliberately turn from the one to the other with a shrug of the shoulder, and murmur, "*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*" Gower, I wish I could shake a little of my determination into you. I wish I had your chances.'

'Of what?'

'Of rising to a position of influence,' said Lyon, with a

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sigh. He was not without ambition, you see; was there ever a clever, energetic man who was?

'That is a revelation,' said Gower, taken by surprise. 'I thought you were content with what you have. Your casket has not proved a success then?'

'You forget I am only turning the key,' replied Lyon, quietly. 'I do not doubt the contents, though I have never seen them.'

He opened the chess-board, and soon they were lost in the intricacies of a game.

He left rather earlier that evening and called at Mrs. Ripon's. The children were asleep, and the old man nodding by the fire. He jumped up as Lyon entered, and cast a scared look at the inner door.

'Come, father, come, it's only Mr. Lyon,' said his daughter, cheerily. But she failed to reassure him, and he sat down in an evident state of perturbation.

'Well, daddy, how are you?' asked Lyon.

'I'm dead beat,' replied the old man, with a sudden look of cunning in his eyes. 'I've been miles, and miles, and miles to-day. I can scarce keep awake.'

'Hadn't you better go to bed, father?' said his daughter, with a significant glance at Lyon. 'It's getting late, and Mr. Lyon won't mind, as you've been so far.'

'Oh no, not at all; and here's a time-table for you, daddy.'

The old man seized it and hobbled into the next room, chuckling at the success of his stratagem; thinking, poor old man, that no one saw through it, no one suspected.

'There now, poor old dear, he's happy,' said his daughter, compassionately. 'He's got safely off to his papers, and we think he's gone to bed, because he's tired. Very well, daddy, 'twon't hurt us nor you, and we won't let you know we're up to the game; will we, Mr. Lyon?'

'Certainly not. He must have a pretty good stock of papers there, Mrs. Ripon.'

'So he have, sir; the place is chuck full, but I daren't touch one for the world! he'd know, the moment he opened the door, I do believe. I took one once to curl Katie's hair, and he didn't get over it for weeks.'

'It's a very harmless monomania; we must be thankful it's no worse.'

Most men would have said, 'You must be thankful,' but the

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grand secret of this man's influence lay in his sympathy; he did not sorrow *for* other people, he sorrowed *with* them, and in that lay his success.

'Yes, sir, that we must,' replied the woman, unconsciously grasping the oneness of sympathy, and losing half her burden. 'He might have took against the children, but he's fond on them both, more especially the other one, I think.'

'What, Sybil? Have you heard any more?'

'No, sir, not a word.'

'And received nothing?'

A shake of the head gave answer. Lyon was silent.

'But I haven't give up hope yet, Mr. Lyon,' continued Mrs. Ripon, recovering her cheerfulness with an effort. 'It may come yet. 'Taint no use looking down about it; I mean to do my best, and trust for the rest.'

'That's a brave little woman,' said Lyon, smiling. 'How's trade going, now?'

'Very lively, sir; plenty to do.'

'That's right. Now I want to enlist your sympathy. Are you willing to give a helping hand to someone who is down?'

'Surely, sir, if I can. But what can I do?'

'I will tell you. Mother Willett has under her care at present a girl, very young, not twenty I'm sure, and *not* a bad girl at heart. Poor thing, she thought the only way out of it all was through the river yonder, and I want you to help me to show her the right way. Will you do it?'

'What do you want me to do, Mr. Lyon?' asked the little woman, her eyes shining.

'I want to bring her here, into the empty room opposite; and I want you to let her sit with you, and teach her your trade, and love her and take care of her. Is it too much?'

'Indeed no! let her come now, at once!' was the quick reply. 'What a good thing the room is still empty; I'll go and engage it this very moment, sir.'

And off went the little woman, her heart brimming over with kindness, and charitableness, and sympathy.

'Such things as these redeem the world,' murmured Lyon. 'Why are there not more women like her?'

And his thoughts flew off to Alison Wycherley, and he wondered what her answer would have been had he even mentioned such an one as Rose.

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'I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing,' he exclaimed mentally. 'And yet what harm could it do? She would be none the worse, and Rose would be all the better. Women don't know their own influence, or perhaps they would use it more.' One of the children stirred and sat up in bed. It was Sybil, her lovely little face flushed with sleep, and her fair hair tumbling over her shoulders.

'Oh, Mithter Lyon!' she cried, clapping her hands with delight. 'I am tho glad to thee you.'

The pretty lisp, the bewitching little face, were irresistible. Lyon took her in his arms and kissed her.

'Is Sybil glad?' he asked, in a tone of rare tenderness.

'Thybil tho glad! Thybil like to live alwayth with you,' replied the child emphatically, stroking his face with her little hot hand.

A new thought flashed into Lyon's mind. Why shouldn't he have just such a dear little thing as this playing about his rooms and making home of them? It was an entirely new idea, and he stood lost in a reverie.

'Oh, you naughty child!' cried Mrs. Ripon, coming back from her errand, successful and triumphant. 'What business had you to be awake? back to bed this moment,' and she bundled the child back into the cot and covered her up. 'Kiss Mr. Lyon? yes, if he'll kiss a naughty baby who wakes up when she ought to be asleep.'

Lyon stooped over the child with a new feeling of proprietorship. Might she not one day be his, his own little adopted child? True there was the father, but in all probability he had given her up altogether, glad to be rid of the burden.

Glad to be rid of it! the very thought seemed a sacrilege, as he looked down into the large fearless blue eyes. 'God helping me it shall be my chiefest treasure,' he murmured to himself. 'Good night, my little one,' he added aloud. 'Shut those blue eyes and go to sleep, and I'll come and see you again soon.'

He went out, after making a few arrangements with Mrs. Ripon for Rose's comfort. All the way home he saw a picture: that of a crimson rug in a dark room, and on that rug a little child with eyes clear and beautiful as the azure sky, and soft, fair hair falling like a veil over little white shoulders; saw it so clearly, so distinctly, that he stopped and shook off the

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enchantment before he entered the room. There was the crimson rug, but where was the child? Drawing a chair before the fire, he sat down and fell into a reverie. Before him rose a dark and dismal room. There was no furniture save a bed on the floor, and on that bed lay a dying man, and by his side crouched a boy: that was the scene. He could see the face of the man, but the boy's was buried in the clothes. Then, like a voice heard in a dream, the man spoke.

'First of all, John, love God; and secondly, love thy neighbour. Don't go in for milk-and-water religion, lad: there are many sorts in the world; but find out one that satisfies the heart, and then make the most of it. Find a God whom you can respect, John, and when found never let go; hold Him fast and He'll hold you.' That was all.

And then came the question, 'Is He found, this God?' and Lyon answered, 'He is found.'

He saw another scene. A boy stood alone at the corner of a dim, unlighted street. Far in front gleamed the light of a great thoroughfare, and as he stood and looked, a conflict went on within. Which should it be; fun and frolic and dissipation, or rest and study and safety? He turned irresolute; the homeward way was dark and lonely—should he go? 'Find a God whom you can respect,' said memory, and already experience had taught him to listen to the voice; and he went home.

Again, and again; the same boy; now a young man, and still at times the same conflict. Stronger temptations, more alluring dissipations, and still the same voice.

Here, in bold relief, stood out the offer of independence, riches; and at the cost of what? Only his upright honour! only the unstained purity of his pen, which had hitherto written nothing but unequivocal truth. And for a moment he wavered, but he had found it out by this time; he knew that the God he could respect was the God who taught him to respect himself, and he cast aside the bait and rose above it.

Now thirty years of life had passed: what of them? On every hand sin and misery and want were weaving their endless chains, and what could one man do among so many? Not much, truly. He could but stand in his place and fight single-handed with a giant foe; he could but withhold one pure drop here and there from falling into the polluted stream.

But was that nothing? it was his all. 'Sow the seed,' came

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a whispered voice; 'do thy part and I will do mine. What thine has been thou wilt know hereafter.' And John Lyon rose with a start, and in that midnight hour registered a vow, 'God, I will do my part!'

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CHAPTER VI.

GOWER'S FIRST VICTORY.

AS soon as he was able to sit up, Gower set to work to write sermons. There was his text, and upon it he had to build an elaborate structure. It was easy work and afforded him considerable amusement, for his sense of the ludicrous was constantly appealed to by the striking incongruity. Here was he, a penniless, drunken vagabond, writing lessons of morality and sobriety for respectable, sedate congregations, who would listen devoutly to each word as it fell from their teacher's lips.

The poisoning case was still going on, and it was doubtful which way the verdict would go, so he could not finish his work. However, he did as much as he could, and then left it and went out. As he passed Mrs. Ripon's door the children ran out, and he stopped to speak to them. Sybil's face instantly riveted his attention.

'Is this the child you found?' he said to Mrs. Ripon, who stood at the door.

'Yes, sir,' she answered.

'What are you going to do with her?'

'Keep her as long as I can.'

'I suppose it is as much as you can do to keep your own child and your father.'

'Well, sir, that's hard work sometimes; but we've never wanted bread yet, and I'm thinking we never shall. You are better, sir?'

'Yes, I'm better at last; not up to much yet. Good evening.'

He went on, but suddenly stopped and looked back. 'What will become of the child if you can't keep her?'

'Well, sir, there's only the House,' was the reluctant reply.

'The workhouse? Well, she'd be taken care of there,

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wouldn't she? They would give her plenty to eat, and teach her to read and write. What more do you want?'

'It's plain to see you've got no children of your own!' said the little woman with indignation. ''Tain't only victuals a baby wants; it's love, bless her, and she shall have it. I wonder how you'd feel if a child of yours was sent to the workhouse!'

'Thankful that there was a workhouse for it to go to, most likely.'

'Aye, poor thing!' muttered Mrs. Ripon, turning back to her room. 'Maybe 'twould be the best thing for *it*.'

She emphasized the *it* as much as to say that it would not be the best thing for another child, and Gower winced.

'She's quite right,' he thought bitterly as he walked on. 'It might be the best thing for a child of mine! a drunkard's child.'

His face darkened, and he hurried on. At the door of a dingy shop in a back street he paused, irresolute. A man standing behind the counter looked up, and recognising him, called him by name.

'Gower, is that you? I thought you'd given us the slip and hooked it.'

He was a hard-featured, coarse-looking man, with keen eyes full of ready suspicion. At the patronizing familiarity of his manner Gower frowned, and drew himself up with a haughty gesture; but in a moment the recollection of their relative positions came over him, and his face fell.

'No such luck,' he replied, stepping in; 'here I am, and here I must stay. What's going on?'

'Nothing particular. Have you got those sermons done?'

'Nearly; I'm waiting to see which way the verdict is likely to go.'

'Any fool can see that with half an eye,' was the coarse reply.

'Probably; but I'm not a fool, so cannot claim a fool's privilege,' said Gower, conquering his resentment with an effort. 'Perhaps you will kindly enlighten me and I will go and finish the sermons at once.'

For three weeks he had been shut out from all companionship with such men as these, and now he shrank from them with disgust, which increased as he followed him into a little black back office. But he was too much dependent upon him to allow the feeling to be seen, and he sat down in silence.

'I have a thing here I think you can manage,' said the man,

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who was the proprietor and publisher of a number of cheap serials. 'Have you done anything in the fiction line?'

'Not of the class you would require,' said Gower, with half-veiled contempt. 'What sort do you want?'

'I want a regular dashing tale of adventures. Plenty of hair-breadth escapes and miraculous rescues, and so on. Have a daring young hero who sticks at nothing, and a young and lovely heroine, and follow 'em up with a few murders and robberies; a shipwreck might be made very effective. Think you can manage it?'

'Something after the "Jack Sheppard" and "Pirate of the Deep" style, I suppose?'

'Yes; only a little more modern; it takes better if you touch in their own times, you see; 'specially if you describe things they've seen themselves. Have you ever been inside Newgate?'

'No; I have not.'

'No offence, no offence,' said the man with a slight smile, which irritated Gower almost beyond endurance. 'I only thought you might make a good thing of the dark cell. Shut your hero up in it and describe his sensations; it would come home to lots, you see, besides interesting those who are on the road. Make it as sensational as you can; that's the sort to go. None of your wishy-washy goods that won't go down.'

'Sermons and sensational horrors,' said Gower banteringly. 'What else?'

'Anything that'll sell comes all right to me,' replied the publisher. 'I'm not one of your strait-laced ones. Pile up the horrors and it'll sell like wildfire. You've got a ready pen, I know; I fancy you're my man.'

Gower hesitated; the work was not quite to his taste, but he dared not refuse. 'Beggars can't be choosers,' he thought. 'Money I must have, and here's my chance.'

He scarcely understood his own reluctance, for he was not accustomed to think twice about such things; when he needed money he worked for it, but how he worked he did not trouble.

'It is something new for me to be fastidious!' he thought, sarcastically. 'One thing is as good as another, so here goes.'

He completed the bargain after a little disputing about terms, and receiving a couple of sovereigns as earnest money, left the shop. On coming into the open air he felt dizzy and ill; everything seemed to swim round him and he leaned

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against the wall for support. The passers-by turned to look at him, and he heard one say, 'Drunk of course; he always is, poor wretch!'

At the half-pitying, half-contemptuous words he started as if stung, and moved on, supplied with new strength. At the corner there was a tavern, and he stopped at the door. The temptation to enter was fearfully strong, and he felt that he could not resist it. In vain he struggled against the overpowering craving; every moment increased its intensity. A woman coming out noticed his white face and stopped.

'Are you ill?' she asked, and he nodded.

'Then don't go in there,' she cried fiercely. 'Go home and get out of the way of temptation. Do you feel a raging thirst?'

'Yes, yes,' he murmured, putting up his hand to his parched lips.

'And so do I, and I've drunk, and drunk, and drunk, and yet the thirst is there still! It's my belief it's born in some folks.'

She took hold of his arm and led him away, and he was too weak to resist. As he toiled wearily up the stairs on his way to his room Mrs. Ripon came out on the landing, and seeing his unsteady gait thought he was drunk.

'Oh, sir,' she said reproachfully, 'what will Mr. Lyon say.'

He waved her on one side and passed on without a word. Arrived at his own room, he threw himself on the bed and immediately fell asleep. It was daylight when he awoke, and he heard a rustle by the bed. Turning his head he saw the child Sybil quietly getting down from a chair. He watched her as she crossed the floor on tiptoe; then the little feet went pitter-patter down the stairs, and presently Mrs. Ripon came up with a cup and saucer and plate on a tray.

'I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir, for what I said last night,' she said apologetically.

'How do you know it wasn't true?'

'Because Mr. Lyon came directly afterwards and saw you asleep, and said it was a natural faintness. You see, sir, you wasn't strong enough to go out.'

'Did he leave any message?'

'He's coming this evening. Katie and baby have took it in turns to sit here and wait for you to wake; it pleases them to think they are of use, bless them'

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True to his word, Lyon came in the evening, but Gower told him nothing of his agreement with Burt the publisher; he was secretly ashamed of it, and dreaded its being known, especially by Lyon, whom he had learned to respect as well as like.

'Do you feel up to a short walk?' asked Lyon.

'I feel up to getting out of this hole; I'm sick to death of it,' he replied with a look of disgust.

'Then we will go round to my place; the change will do you good.'

They went out, walking slowly for Gower's benefit, as he was still weak. The fresh air, however, soon revived him, and he regained something of his old insouciance. It was impossible to be insensible to his charm of manner, and Lyon found himself listening to him with the indulgent affection of an elder brother. He could not but admire him, with his frank, handsome face and genial manner, and quick, clever intellect. And he did not try to hide his admiration, and this was one great reason of his hold upon him. Gower recognised his superiority and was forced to look up to him, and the fact that instead of looking down upon him Lyon liked him and cared for his society, touched a long-silent chord of self-respect, and by raising himself in his own estimation also raised Lyon.

'And meanwhile Greek has gone to the wall,' he said, as he sat down in the comfortable arm-chair.

'Then we must bring it to the fore again. I have not given up the idea; it is one of the things to be talked over.'

Gower shrugged his shoulder; a French habit he had learned abroad. 'Go ahead,' he said, resignedly; 'I'll try to bear my fate.'

'Nonsense, man! things must be talked over. Don't be so lazy; rouse yourself.'

'You do that for me.'

'I am glad to hear it; there are few things more dangerous than indolent lethargy.'

'There are few things more aggravating than to be hustled and hurried along the line by a tearing express,' retorted Gower; 'it takes my breath away to think of it.'

'Better be an express than a miserable slow parliamentary, stopping wherever it can possibly find an excuse for stopping. But, seriously, Gower, it is time you began to think of some plan for the future. You must live.'

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'Thank you; I am aware of the dismal fact.'

'Is it dismal?' said Lyon, dreamily.

Gower looked at him curiously. 'Where are you gone now?' he asked, after a pause.

Lyon started. I had gone back to a time when life was a dismal fact to me,' he replied. 'A time of mental biliousness, when everything was out of order. I suppose most men have such feelings sooner or later in their lives, and fortunate the one who knows how to get rid of them.'

'How did you get rid of them?'

Lyon had risen, and was pacing the floor, with his hands clasped behind him. 'In the first place I tried to look the possible future in the face. I was dissatisfied with my position, angry with the power that had placed me in it, and consequently life seemed to me not worth the holding. I saw no prospect of materially bettering my position; I had no friends to help me, and, though I had read of self-made men, I had no idea how to set to work to follow their example. Things looked discouraging enough, and I was strongly tempted to throw up the game, and let circumstances float me on to—I really didn't care where.'

'A natural enough feeling.'

'Natural enough, yes; but very unsatisfactory. It takes the life out of a man to feel that he has no control over his destiny; that he is like a useless log drifting on with the tide. At any rate, it took the life out of me, and forced me to stop and think. I said to myself, Here am I with a fair share of physical and mental strength, capable of much, yet weakly giving way to what seems the force of circumstance, instead of making circumstance give way to me and my will.'

'It is easy to talk; circumstance won't be balked.'

'It can in many cases be made subservient to our will. Looking the whole matter fully in the face, it seemed to resolve itself into this: Govern me or I will govern you. I preferred the former.

'Doubtless! but how did you do it?'

'I resolved to set before myself an ideal life, an ideal character, and then to live my life independently of all outward circumstance, to be governed by certain laws which nothing should have power to touch.'

'What laws were they?'

'It took me some time to determine. It is one thing to

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say, My life shall be governed by laws which shall leave me perfect freedom, and yet guide me into a circle of security: it is another thing to find those laws. I did not feel inclined to burden myself with a thousand and one restrictions, merely because this, that, or the other of the religious factions of the day deemed them necessary.'

'No one in his senses would,' said Gower, contemptuously. 'Most of the so-called religion of the present day is hypocrisy and cant. Well, what did you do?'

'I did not know what to do, so I drifted on for a time, and then it came to me that the first thing to be done was to arrive at some decision as to the aim of life, what it really was.'

'And what decision did you come to?' asked Gower, his interest deepening as Lyon went on.

'At the first glance it seems a selfish one. Every man is responsible for his own welfare, therefore his first duty is to himself.'

'That is what you meant by taking care of number one.'

'Yes. It seemed to me, and does now, that the aim of life is to educate and raise each individual character into something more than a mere eating, drinking, and pleasure-taking machine. We have capabilities that can be educated almost without limit; no one knows to what height, mentally, morally, and spiritually, he may attain. Look at the theory in the vegetable world; who can tell what that simple weed may become in the hands of a skilful gardener? Cultivation——'

'Natural Selection,' put in Gower.

'And other causes work together to one end, namely, the elevation of the subject. If this be true in the vegetable world, why not in the human? The more I thought of it, the firmer hold it obtained, and finally I concluded that the chief object of life should be to cultivate oneself.'

'And then, I suppose, came the how, when, and where?'

'Exactly; and there, again, came a difficulty; I found so many conflicting theories on the subject. Of course I started with the supposition that the spiritual came first, being the most important part of man.'

'Query.'

'Man's happiness depends upon it, therefore it is to him the most important.'

'But does his happiness depend upon it? that is the question.'

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'Which each must answer according to experience. My experience taught me to place it first years ago, and I have learned nothing to influence me otherwise. What would you place first?'

'Never mind me, go on. How did you manage about religion? You were not easily suited, I'll be bound.'

'No, I was not. It was two years before I finally decided that question. I had to dissect, or rather vivisect, the religious theories of the day, and it was no easy matter. I had no idea before that there were so many opposing theories.'

'Their name is legion. And as for your correction, you might have used *dissect* with propriety; they are dead enough, some of them. Well?'

'The rest is soon told. I found, at last, a model, that of the only perfect manhood ever known. There was my ideal character, and it satisfied me in every point. Having found this, the rest was easy. I searched for the laws which govern my ideal, and took them for my own.'

'And they were?'

'"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and hy neighbour as thyself."'

'Do you mean to say you rule your life by that?' demanded Gower.

'I mean to say that that is, in its simplest form, the law which I have taken, and intend to hold as far as possible,' said Lyon, steadily. 'Why not?'

At the simple question Gower was staggered.

'Well, it accounts for much,' he said, at length. 'I can understand you better now.'

There was a perceptible shade of disappointment in his voice which Lyon did not fail to notice.

'You do not like my law?' he said, quickly.

'Well, to tell the truth, Lyon, I don't,' was the frank reply. 'It seems an ungracious thing to say, but I have no faith in it.'

'Have you any faith in me?' asked Lyon.

'Yes, I have; more than in any one I know. But even you may be mistaken.'

'You admit that I am capable of forming an opinion?'

'Certainly.'

'Then all I ask you is to let the question rest and watch the result. Let my theory work for itself, and after all it is by

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results we judge. I am content to abide by your own decision, only you must give it a fair chance.'

'I am willing. But what do you call a fair chance?'

'A cool, impartial, patient observation. Watch the workings of my theory in such cases as you can, and allow yourself time to be persuaded.'

'I'm not easily persuaded.'

'All the better; you will take a firmer stand. Now we have talked enough about me and mine, I am sure.'

'One question first. How about the dismal fact?'

'The adjective is changed, that is all,' replied Lyon, with a smile. 'I scarcely know what one to put instead.'

'Not pleasant, or happy, then?' said Gower, with just a shadow of triumph on his face.

Lyon shook his head. 'I think,' he said, slowly, 'that life to me now is a satisfying fact, and there is an ever-present consciousness of more to come, if you can understand what that means.'

Gower gazed into the fire, but did not speak. He was contrasting the words with his own experience and present feelings. All the light and satisfaction of his life lay in the past; he looked for none *to come*, and for the moment a bitter resentment came over him that it should be so.

'After all, yours is a theory of work,' he said, suddenly. 'It wouldn't suit all.'

'I don't know; I fancy no one can be happy without work of some sort. Time drags heavily when we have nothing to do.'

'Apropos, I have found something to do.'

'What sort of a something?'

'Literary work,' replied Gower, carelessly, and then changed the conversation; he had no wish to enter into particulars, and Lyon asked no questions.

'Is this your taste in books?' asked Gower, lounging to the bookcase, and running his eye along its contents.

'That is my circulating library.'

'Your what?'

'My circulating library for my boys.'

'And pray how many boys have you?'

'Between twenty and thirty just now. They have fallen off lately—during my illness.'

'Come, this is something fresh,' said Gower. 'Are you a

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schoolmaster, too? Who are your boys, where do they come from, and what do you do with them?'

'In the first place, they are mostly gutter boys, fusee sellers, and so on; they come from everywhere, I think; and I have them here twice a week to teach them.'

'Teach them what?'

'The three R's,' replied Lyon. 'You can come and help me, if you like.'

'Thank you! it isn't in my line.'

'And sermon-writing is,' said Lyon, with good-humoured irony.

'That's amusement,' said Gower, lightly; 'the other is hard work, which you go in for, and I don't.'

He went back to his lodgings early that night, and Lyon went with him. On passing the scene of his former exploit he was silent, and Lyon felt a shiver run through him. They walked on, neither speaking for a few minutes, and then he turned and looked behind him.

'Strange! I would give worlds for a glass of brandy. I have money in my pocket, and yet I have passed the door!'

'Consequently your head and hand are steady, you have maintained your self-respect, and you still possess your money. You see, you can do it if you like, Gower.'

'It depends upon mood. If I could always feel like this, it would be easy, perhaps; easy in comparison,' replied Gower, moodily. 'I tell you what it is, Lyon; I would give anything if I could break these chains, but I simply cannot; they are forged too strongly.'

'They have received a blow these last three weeks.'

'Ah, you don't know me! As long as there is no chance of getting it, I can go without; but once place the chance before me, and I am done. If you had not been with me to-night, I should have yielded. The temptation is greater than I can resist.'

'Why don't you let me help you, Gower?' said Lyon, and his tone was just what a brother's might have been, so cheering and encouraging. 'You say you can trust me, then trust me in this. If you once free yourself from this fatal tyranny you will be thankful all your life.'

'You don't know the power of habit.'

'I know the power of will.'

They were at Gower's door, and paused at the foot of the stairs.

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With a sudden impulse Gower stretched out his hand. 'I will make one more effort,' he said, with a tremor in his voice. 'God knows I have tried, but it has been of no use. You give me fresh courage, and I will try again.'

They shook hands and parted, and Gower went upstairs. He waited till Lyon's footsteps died away in the distance, and then crept softly down again, and out into the darkness.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE 'SPIRIT OF WINE.'

For Art has lost its cunning,
And Learning has ceased to shine;
And the light of Religion been darkened,
Before that spirit of wine.'

'O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!'—*Othello.*

ON the curb stone opposite the Criterion door, a little fusee-seller stood shivering in the cold east wind. His gentle, delicate little face attracted many a mother's pitying glance, and often something which was evidently more to his taste, to judge by the furtive smile with which he now and then put his hand in his pocket; but this was only when he felt secure from observation.

Coming down the steps with her father, Alison Wycherley saw him and instinctively paused.

'Papa, look at that little match boy. Poor little fellow! doesn't he look wretched?' she said, pityingly.

The boy heard the words but did not speak; he only looked at her with wistful eyes and pushed a bare shoulder a little further out of the rags which were only a pretence at protection from the cold.

'Hasn't he a sweet face, papa? and such mournful eyes. I should like to speak to him.'

'My dear, half these street boys are impostors.'

'But I do not believe this one can be; let us speak to him, papa, do.'

'I have no objection, my dear. Give him sixpence and let us go.'

Taking a coin from her purse, Alison went up to the child.

'Do you not find it very cold, little boy, standing here in the wind?' she said, kindly.

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'Yes, miss; but I must stand to catch folks coming out. I shouldn't sell my fusees if I didn't.'

'Is this the only way of earning a living? Why don't you get a situation as errand boy? it would be better than this.'

'I'm too little,' said the boy, forlornly; 'besides, nobody won't have me without better clothes.'

'Have you a father and mother?' asked Alison, who looked upon the city Arab much as if he were a little Hottentot.

'My own father and mother are dead. I live with father's second wife, and she turns me out to sell fusees,' replied the boy; and then he went on to tell a tale of hardship and cruelty which brought the tears to Alison's eyes.

Taking out her purse she put back the sixpence, and was taking out a larger coin, when, to her astonishment, the boy suddenly turned sharply round, and, darting among the vehicles, was lost to view in a moment.

'Promiscuous charity is not always wise, Miss Wycherley.'

It was John Lyon's voice; she recognised it immediately.

'Why did he run away?' she asked, unable to understand such a singular proceeding.

'Because he was afraid of me, I think.'

'But why should he be? Surely you would not hurt him,' she replied, looking at him with sudden suspicion.

'Can you imagine no other reason for his fear?' said Lyon, reading her thoughts in her candid eyes.

'I thought he was an impostor; I told you so,' said her father, elated at this proof of his own shrewdness. 'It seems that we are destined to meet in the streets, Mr. Lyon; and again you have rendered us a service.'

'Not much of an one, this time. I have merely spared Miss Wycherley's purse, for which I am afraid she does not thank me.'

'If he be really an impostor,' said Alison, doubtfully, still more inclined to distrust this somewhat stern-looking man than the gentle-faced boy. Women's sympathies are apt to turn to the weak.

'You shall judge for yourself. That is the same boy you watched at the Angel the night we first met, Miss Wycherley.'

'Not the one who was intoxicated?' exclaimed Alison, horrified.

'The same.'

'There, my dear,' said Mr. Wycherley, complacently; and

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then recollecting himself, continued, 'It is impossible to be too much on one's guard in London.'

'But perhaps, poor little fellow, his cruel step-mother drives him to it,' said Alison, anxious to find some excuse for the child, whose appearance had so interested her.

'His step-mother? Oh! I see; that is what he has been telling you. He has no step-mother; he lives with as kind an old grandmother as ever lived.'

'What a depraved little boy!' said Mr. Wycherley, shocked. 'You see, Alison, he is not deserving of your pity.'

'On the contrary, he is more deserving than Miss Wycherley imagined,' said Lyon, quickly.

'What! when he tells such bare-faced untruths as those we have just heard? I do not know what you mean.'

'I mean that the boy who can wilfully and deliberately act the part that boy has done, is far more to be pitied than the innocent little sufferer he wished you to think him. Sin is worse than suffering.'

He raised his hat and passed on.

'What an odd young man that is,' said Mr. Wycherley, gazing after him.

'Young!' echoed his daughter, 'I don't think he is very young, papa.'

'What strange ideas very young people have about age. Mr. Lyon is probably about thirty, and that to me seems very young. You, I suppose, call thirty old.'

'No, I do not: but Mr. Lyon looks so sedate and grave and preoccupied; not a bit like a young man. He is not very polite, is he, papa? he might have stayed and asked how your foot was.'

'He is a very strange young man,' repeated Mr. Wycherley; 'or as you object to that, my dear, I will say middle-aged.'

Alison laughed. 'Nonsense, papa! that sounds worse. I am sorry my attempt at philanthropy should be frustrated, and by the advocate of philanthropy himself, too! That is rather good, isn't it, papa?'

'I wish he would come and see us. No one ever comes to see us here, Alison.'

'And you are so fond of a chat; it is a shame that we have so few friends, papa. Do you know, I fancy Mr. Lyon looks down upon us.'

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'My dear; how can he! He is a very superior young man no doubt, but he is not a gentleman.'

'No: but I believe he thinks we are frivolous and empty, and care only for ourselves. Well, I do not see that it is our duty to worry ourselves to death with other people's troubles; we have quite enough of our own. It is well for Mr. Lyon if he can afford to spend his life for others. I wish we knew some nice people in London; people of our own grade, don't you, papa?'

So John Lyon was dismissed, but Alison did not forget him. He was an entirely new character to her, and she found herself wondering who and what he was, and even what his family were like, and entering into speculations respecting them and him. And then she laughed at herself for doing it.

'It just shows to what I am reduced,' she exclaimed, mentally. 'An ordinary looking—no, he is not ordinary looking, but he is not handsome by any manner of means. —Well, then, to begin again; a rather uncommon looking man, with black hair and dark eyes, crosses my path, performs a simple act of courtesy, expresses a few curious opinions, scarcely looks at me, and then goes away, and here I am wondering what sort of a home he has, and if he is a good son and brother! Really, Alison Wycherley, I gave you credit for more sense!'

'It is very dull for you, my dear,' sighed her father. 'London is a lonely place for the friendless. If only your brother were here!' And then he sighed again, and a shadow fell on Alison's face, and they walked on in silence.

Rose Callaghan sat in Mrs. Ripon's neat little room manipulating feathers, and using scissors and gum with dexterous fingers. She had worked patiently for more than a week, and now was proficient enough to be entrusted with employment on her own account.

'I never saw anyone so quick as you,' said Mrs. Ripon, with admiring looks at the rapid progress of the pretty work. 'It took me months to learn it right well and quick, and you seem to take to it natural.'

'I was always quick with my fingers,' replied Rose; 'father used to tell me my face was my fortune,—only in joke, you know,—but mother used to say it was more like my fingers would be.'

It was the first time she had mentioned anyone connected

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with her past, and Mrs. Ripon listened with sympathy and interest.

'Is your father alive, my dear?' she asked, after a pause, during which the girl's lip quivered and her hand trembled.

'No, he died; and mother, too.'

'Was that before you left home?'

'Yes; and I thought they wouldn't know anything about it, but *he* says they do.'

'Who? Mr. Lyon?'

'Yes; he said she knew all about it, and wanted me up there. It was the night I was going into the river.'

Her voice was so strained and unnatural that Mrs. Ripon was alarmed.

'Don't talk about it, deary,' she said, with a shiver. 'Let us thank Him as sent Mr. Lyon to you.'

The girl dropped her work and bent forward, her eyes shining. 'Tell me,' she whispered eagerly, 'What do you think He did it for? I have such dreadful, dreadful thoughts sometimes! they almost stop my heart beating.'

'What sort of dreadful thoughts, deary?' said Mrs. Ripon, soothingly. 'Tell me about them, and maybe I can help you.'

'They come at night!' panted Rose, casting a terrified look into the dark corner where the children lay sleeping. 'They come with the darkness! Why did He send *him* that night? was it because I'm too bad to die? Mustn't I die?'

'Perhaps it was because He wants you to grow good, deary. He'd rather you was good, you know.'

'I thought He didn't care, but that if people were wicked He cast them out for ever! It's that that kills me! I'm so afraid of Him,' and she rocked herself to and fro, laying her head on the table in an agony of despair. A footstep came up the stairs and stopped on the landing, but she never heard it; then the door opened, and still she knew nothing of the new-comer till a hand, whose touch she recognised, was laid upon her shoulder.

'What is the matter, Rose?'

At the sound of the kind, strong voice, she ceased her sobs and was silent. Seeing that she could not speak, Mrs. Ripon answered for her.

'She's afraid God won't have anything to do with her because she's wicked, sir. Why, it's just the wicked He wants, isn't it?'

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'Ah, but not such as me,' murmured Rose. 'I might have been good once, but they wouldn't let me!'

'Who wouldn't?' asked Lyon.

'All of them! everybody turned from me and sneered at me! The girls wouldn't speak to me, and I wasn't really bad then. I did want to be good, but they drove me away from the village, and then I got desperate. It's too late now!'

'Do you remember the day last week when Sybil was lost?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How did it happen?'

'Mrs. Ripon told them not to leave the doorstep,' said Rose, faintly. 'But Sybil ran after the Italian boys and got out into the street.'

'And when Mrs. Ripon found Katie alone on the step, and heard what had become of Sybil, she was angry, and said, "Let the child go; she has disobeyed my command." Was that it?'

'No, that it wasn't,' cried Mrs. Ripon, somewhat indignantly. 'I told all the neighbours, and they turned out to look for the poor little lamb! Mr. Gower, he come downstairs six at a time! I never see a man with such long legs! He found her ever so far off looking at that nasty monkey.'

'And when he brought her back,' said Lyon, with a smile, 'you scolded her well, of course.'

'Well, I ought to ha' done, but she was that frightened and cried, so I hadn't the heart, sir.'

'And yet here is a child, who has wandered from home, afraid to go back, although her father has sent an especial message to her.'

'But it says in the Bible He hates sin,' murmured Rose.

'And so do you,' said Lyon.

She lifted her head in speechless astonishment.

'Is it not true?' he asked.

'I wish I'd died before I knew what sin meant!' she cried passionately.

'Then you hate it?'

'Yes, yes! I do!'

'But God does not hate *you*, child. Do you think He has not watched you and waited for you to go back? Do you remember the story of the prodigal?'

'Ah, but that was his *son*,' replied Rose, with unconscious irony.

It was not the first time Lyon had met with this answer,

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and he mentally resolved never to mention the parable to a woman again.

'Yes, but there was a certain woman mentioned in the Bible who wiped the Master's feet with her hair,' he continued. 'Was she spurned?'

She shook her head.

'Then there is hope for you. Take courage, Rose, and determine to overcome. This is your warfare, and the devil does not intend you to win. Shall he have his own way?'

'Can I win, sir?' she asked, with a faint gleam of hope and comfort.

'Armed with one thing—yes.'

'What is it, sir?'

'Prayer.'

She put her head down on the table again, but did not speak, and he left the room. Mrs. Ripon ran after him.

'Sir, Mr. Lyon,' she whispered, 'it came this morning?'

'What? not another sovereign!' he replied, as she held up the yellow coin with delighted hands.

'Yes, sir! here it is at last. Nothing but the sovereign in a little box; here's the box and the paper; will you take them?'

The direction was by the same hand as the writing on the first piece of paper. Lyon put them in his pocket and went upstairs. He found Gower busily at work, the table covered with an untidy litter of papers.

'Welcome, friend and mentor,' he said, raising his head as his visitor entered. 'I heard thy voice abroad and flew to bid thee welcome to my roof, but remembering in time that "wine, oil, refreshment" I did lack, I refrained. But, in the words of the immortal Mr. Swiveller, "what is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conwiviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather!" Make yourself at home.'

But despite the careless manner he was evidently ill at ease, and was straining his ears to listen for some sound outside.

Lyon sat down, conscious that for some reason his presence was unwelcome.

'Did you not expect me to-night?' he asked.

'Yes, but not till later on. I thought you were engaged till nine.'

Lyon was silent; he was perplexed and undecided, not caring to stay where he was so evidently not wanted, and yet

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afraid to go. What reason had Gower for wishing his absence? there came but one answer.

A heavy footstep came stumbling up the stairs, and Gower sprang to the door. It was only the occupant of the opposite room, and he returned to his seat disappointed.

'I have been working like a Trojan all day,' he said, with forced ease and lightness. 'That is to say, all the morning and the evening until now. Did I hear your voice below?'

'Yes; one of your prophecies has come to nought.'

'How?'

'Mrs. Ripon has received another sovereign for Sybil.'

Gower looked slightly disconcerted. 'Ah, well, they'll soon get tired of that little game. She is a pretty child.'

'It has disarranged my plans,' said Lyon, thoughtfully. 'I must confess I was disappointed on hearing it; it is selfishness on my part, but I suppose a little of that is inherent in all.'

'Why were you disappointed? I do not see how it can possibly affect you.'

'Well, to tell you the truth, I have had serious thoughts of adopting the child, and if no more money had come I should have done it.'

'You!' exclaimed Gower, startled into brusqueness.

'Why not?'

'What could you do with a mere baby like that?'

'My landlady's niece would make a capital nurse. But it is no use talking of it now; it was a fancy of mine, that is all.'

'If it had been a boy,' continued Gower, in amazement, 'I could have understood it! but what you want to burden yourself with a girl for, passes my comprehension. She would be no end of trouble.'

'And no end of pleasure. It is just because it is a little girl that I want it; I do not want a boy. I should like to have that bonnie little thing running about my rooms. I always had a fancy for a little daughter of my own.'

'And then suppose the parents claimed it, and they were——'

'There is no mother,' interrupted Lyon.

'So much the worse; the father is probably some drunken blackguard, too lazy and dissipated to keep the child himself. If you are wise, you will have nothing to do with other men's children.'

As he spoke the door opened, and a boy's hoarse voice said,—

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'Here it is, mister. I couldn't bring it no quicker.'

Gower sprang to the door, but it was too late; the boy stood inside holding out a bottle of brandy.

With a suppressed oath he snatched it from him and pushed him out of the room. Then with a miserable attempt at explanation he said, 'I sent for a bottle to keep by me in case I felt faint.'

It was a failure, and he knew it as he spoke, and then he turned sullen.

'I am ill,' he said, 'I must have it. I shall die if I don't.'

'You will die if you do,' replied Lyon quietly. He had risen and was standing before the fire. As Gower sat heavily down he walked round and stood beside him.

'You said last night that you trusted me,' he continued, 'will you prove that trust now? will you believe that I would ask nothing from you but what is for your own good?'

'Oh, I know that.'

'Then will you grant me this one thing?'

He touched the bottle mechanically as he spoke, and Gower looked up quickly, and stretched out his hand towards it.

Lyon drew back.

'I am not going to take it by force.'

'I tell you I have been feeling ill all day; I must have some stimulant!' said Gower, his anger rising, as it will with men when they have no reason left. 'I cannot live without it. I told you I would try, and I have tried! I have suffered torment such as you never dreamed of since this morning, and now I give in. I've tried and failed, and here goes for the only comfort left in the world.'

He seized hold of the bottle, and swinging it round with a reckless hand, dashed the neck off against the mantlepiece. A glass lay on the table; and filling it full of the brandy, he lifted it to his lips. Quick as lightning Lyon raised his hand and dashed it to the ground. For a few seconds the two men stood face to face in silence; each pale and with compressed lips, but one with a gleam of mad anger in his eyes.

'Oh, oh! friend Lyon,' he cried mockingly, losing all self-control, 'is this how you intend to help me? A sensible way, a wise way, truly! Do you think there is but one glass of brandy in a bottle? see here.' And raising the broken bottle he poured the fiery draught down his throat. 'You thought to make a teetotaller of me, didn't you? Not just yet,

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Mr. Lyon, if you please; I have other intentions. Come, drop the veil, old fellow; you know you'd like a glass as well as any one. Have a glass and let's be jolly. Here's to the health of all good comrades.' And with another deep drink he broke into a song,—

> '"There's naught that cheers the hearts that pine,
> Like a deep, deep draught of the good Rhine wine.' "

Wine or brandy, what does it matter? it is all the same! Doesn't it suit you? I daresay not, it's too strong, too divine a drink for milksops!'

And so he raved on, now drinking, now singing, now taunting Lyon, who stood listening with impenetrable face. They were the ravings of a madman, and not worth noticing. But nature herself interposed; his illness had made him weak, and the brandy took unusual effect. The bottle dropped from his nerveless hand and was shattered into fragments on the ground, and he sank exhausted into a chair, trembling in every limb. This was what Lyon was waiting for; and taking him in his strong arms he put him on the bed, where he lay insensible.

'Defeat number one,' he said to himself; 'but one defeat does not lose the day. I'll fight on yet.'

Then came the question, 'Why should you trouble yourself? What is this man to you? He is a hopeless, incurable drunkard; let him go his own way.'

Looking down on the insensible form in its heavy drunken sleep, the temptation was strong. For one short minute he hesitated, and then his firmly compressed lips took additional firmness, and he shook off the thought.

'I have voluntarily taken up the work! I will fight for victory till the very last, so God help me.'

As he went downstairs late that night, a crouching form in the room to the left on the landing below crept to the door in the darkness, and listened with bated breath to the sound of his receding footsteps.

'I thought all men were hard and cruel,' whispered a voice out of the silence. 'I thought everybody hated and despised me! But he spoke kindly to me, and called me Rose; not *young woman*, as that other one did! *He* said I could win if I prayed. O God, Thou wouldst not let him, so good and noble, say so if it wasn't true!'

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And a fair head, once sinless as a little child's, was laid on the bare boards, while the pure white wings of God's Angel of Hope hovered over the spot, and made it holy with a gleam of light from the Sacred Book.

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels."

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOYS' CLASS.

'Better build schoolrooms for the boy,
Than cells and gibbets for the man.'—*Eliza Cook.*

LYON felt that he had made a mistake. In dashing the glass to the ground he had done harm, not good; Gower, in his excited state of mind, had looked upon it as an unwarrantable interference, rather than an act of friendship, and it had roused all the bad feeling in him.

'It was a mistake,' thought Lyon, as he walked home. 'I ought to have known better: he is just the one whom such an act would enrage and rouse into defiance! and yet what could I do?'

Nothing. Men are sometimes placed in circumstances when all they can do is, watch and wait; when action is impossible, and words of no avail. What is the use of arguing with a madman? and the man under the influence of drink is neither more nor less than a madman.

It was nearly twelve, and all the public-houses were closed; but now and then a drunken man stumbled past him in the dim light, or reeled out of some alley into the street. At one corner a group of young men were talking loudly, and coarse oaths and curses and sickening blasphemy interlarded every sentence. One of them recognised Lyon, and with unusual civility touched his hat. He was fresh from a little country village, and had not lost quite all his boyish sense of honour and truth and manliness; but he was in a good school.

One of the others laughed mockingly. 'It is old Lyon,' he said, winking at his companions. 'He's going to make a saint of you, Merton! he's got his eye on you.'

'No he hasn't,' said the boy, for he was little more. 'He ain't going to make a saint of me, I can tell you.'

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'But you can't help yourself,' was the aggravating reply. 'You go to his house, and that is the first step. Come now, don't he talk to you out of the Bible?'

'No, he don't,' said Merton, reddening uncomfortably. 'He's never said one word of religion to me yet.'

'Ah! yet! that's it: he will soon. The next time you go he'll say, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." That means us, you know: we are sinners, miserable sinners, ain't us, Ned?' And the speaker, who had drawled out the proverb with a nasal twang, burst into a loud laugh, in which the others joined.

'Another lad making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,' thought Lyon, sadly. 'What a strange fascination there is in sin, and what a power for evil in ridicule. Now that boy won't come to the readings again; he'll be afraid. Well, I am not going to give you up without a struggle, Merton; we will see which is the stronger, I, or the representative of the devil.'

Possibly the young man so designated would have taken it as a personal compliment if he had heard. It was a fitting term as Lyon well knew.

There were times in John Lyon's life when the shadow of a great fear and doubt fell upon him—times when he was haunted by a persistent questioning, 'Is life worth the trouble you are taking with it? Will the end of all things recompense you? Is there not something better than you have found?' and the answer was not always ready.

It is easy, when life is bright, and joyous, and free from care—when no troubles assail, no sorrows grieve and perplex, to repeat the orthodox creed, 'I believe in one God, ruler of all things, guide of all who believe in Him.' But when the eye rests on scenes of suffering and wrong-doing, of evil deeds, and the consequences thereof falling upon innocent heads—then it is a different matter. We are ready enough to acknowledge the guiding hand in the daylight and sunshine, through the pleasant fields and shady lanes. It gratifies us to see all things going well with us and ours, and the thought suggests itself naturally that God has us under His especial protection and care. But when the darkness falls, and our feet stumble in rough and stony valleys, and great rocks of peril loom out of the shadow and surrounding gloom, our faith fails us, and we grope about for a landmark, and think we are forsaken and

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left to ourselves. We can see no love in discipline, no wisdom in correction. It was well for John Lyon that he had a strong indomitable will. What would have crushed weaker men nerved him to more determined and resolute action, and though at times he faltered, his own natural strength of character forced him to battle on, rather than succumb and sink into lethargy.

There is in God's arrangements, as well as man's, a fitness and propriety which are not always recognized. When a lad has been educated behind his father's counter and likes and understands his father's trade, it is but natural and right that on leaving home he should enter the same business elsewhere. The boy with a taste for mechanics, throws up the plough and turns his attention to that for which he is by nature fitted. So it is through all things; and when God has a special work to be done, He finds the special man. The captain does not engage for his ship the delicate ailing boy, but the sturdy man; rough work requires strong hands. God did not send a Peter, but a Paul before most noble Festus. Many a man in Lyon's place would have been swamped and carried away by the stream of circumstance. The sin, the want, and the misery, the apparently hopeless degradation which met him on every side would have crushed the heart out of a weaker man, or drawn him into the vortex.

'Why do you stay here?' he was asked, sometimes. 'Why do you spend your time and money upon people who have no claim upon you?'

Other men could not understand it. It seemed to them a waste of everything a man ought to prize; but Lyon thought otherwise. Silent and reserved among those who associated with him in business, he rarely attempted any explanation of what was to them an enigma. His employers, kind and courteous men, who knew well how to value and prize the services of the man whose upright character and unswerving integrity had won their respect and esteem, looked upon him with curiosity, wondering what could be the inducement to a mind of such calibre to bury itself in the wilds of city heathendom. Life was purely a question of £ *s. d.* with them, and they could understand nothing of higher motives and aims.

This is sometimes called a religious age, and people talk largely of the strides of Christianity. But while Christianity advances, so also do scepticism, atheism, and worldliness, and

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where religion counts her increase by tens, irreligion, active and aggressive, counts hers by tens of tens. Often, after passing hours in haunts of crime and sin and vice, John Lyon went back to his home heartsick and sad, wondering why it was allowed and what the end would be. It was at such times as these that his faith failed him, and he shrank from the apparently hopeless task before him. What was he among so many? What was the strength of his single arm opposed to the sweeping tide of iniquity which threatened to carry all before it?

But even amid the darkness of this modern Sodom appeared scenes which the old city of sin had never witnessed. Year by year the number of those who were struggling upward into the light of Christianity increased, and Lyon knew where to lay his hands on—not fifty, but hundreds—of men and women who could repeat the words of the psalmist of Israel, and say, 'The Lord is my light.'

Lyon looked forward to the next evening with anxiety. He did not expect to see Gower, and yet there was a lingering hope that he would come at the appointed time. It was just possible that the morning would bring repentance and shame for the part he had acted, in which case he might come.

The evening passed slowly on, and still he hoped against hope; but when the clock struck eleven he gave up: it was certain he would not come then.

It was a disappointment to him, a keen one. He did not realize till then how great an interest he took in this comparative stranger, or how anxiously he had listened for his footstep. The effect of the disappointment was characteristic. Some men would have been discouraged, and given up all hope; some would have been indignant; Lyon felt all the combativeness in his nature roused, and so far from being discouraged and acknowledging himself defeated, he registered a vow to leave no stone unturned, no effort untried, to bring about the end he had in view. Gower was no longer an acquaintance, in whom he took a friendly interest, but, in a certain sense, an opponent, striving for a victory. He was determined to throw aside every consideration, and go headlong to ruin; Lyon was *now* equally determined to oppose him and hold him back. It would be a trial of strength, and Gower a fighter on both sides. In his moments of self-control and restraint, when self-respect held sway, he would aid Lyon; but when the drink-madness

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was on him, he would fight desperately for his own ruin, himself his own most bitter foe.

The next evening Lyon was engaged till late with his class of boys. They were a queer, rough set, and would have frightened most of our ordinary schoolmasters. Lyon called them his colts, and the term was well applied. For the most part they were lawless young rascals, with a keen appreciation of the value of freedom and an intense hatred of restraint in any shape or form. It was a mystery to many why they continued to come to the class, where they were forced into a sedateness of behaviour most unusual to them. The secret lay in Lyon's influence. He knew each boy individually; knew his disposition, his occupation, and his home relationships, while they looked upon him as a friend, and respected and liked him.

There was a large unoccupied room near his lodgings, which he had hired for various purposes. Every day in the week some meeting took place in it. Mothers' meetings, over which Mother Willett presided; singing-classes for girls and boys; social meetings for young men, and others of like character.

Every Wednesday was his boys' evening, when they came for lessons in reading, writing, etc. Many of these boys he had known for years, but new-comers were constantly arriving of whom he knew nothing. There were several this night, brought in by their comrades. One of the fresh boys, however, Lyon recognized at once. It was Willie Winter, the boy he had watched at the Angel being carried to prison, drunk.

He was surprised to see him, for he had tried often, though ineffectually, to induce him to come.

'Well, Willie,' he said, patting his shoulder, 'you have come to join my boys, have you? You might do worse, mightn't he, boys? We have some good times together, don't we?'

'We haven't had no good times of late,' said a big, broad-shouldered boy named Nicholas. 'It's been all work and no play, Mr. Lyon, so don't wonder if you finds us a lot o' dull Jacks to-night.'

'But suppose we hurry over lessons and have something else for a change,' said Lyon.

The boys understood, and gave a shout of delight.

'Hurrah!' cried Nicholas, who was generally spokesman. 'You're a brick, guv'ner; what shall we do?'

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'Lessons first, and then we'll talk it over. Business before pleasure, Nicholas.'

They got out their books and slates willingly enough, laughing and chaffing each other the while. It was about as unlike an orthodox school as it is possible to imagine. The master sat coolly sharpening a pencil, listening with amused face to the ready and often witty answers of his wild charge. Only once did he interfere, and that was when one of them swore. A word was enough: the boy looked abashed, and muttered something about meaning no harm, but he did not repeat the offence.

For about half-an-hour lessons were in full swing. Willie Winter and the other new boys looked on with amazement; it was something so strange to them to see their *confrères* of the streets and gutters busy over decimals and fractions, or spelling with evident pride long words of three or four syllables. Anything that gave the boys a chance of triumphing over their companions they gloried in, and the classes were their delight. To hustle the one above him down and take his place was worth the trouble of learning to spell a few words, and when once the spirit of emulation is at work the rest is easy. Lyon had rarely any trouble with what were called 'class lessons,' those they repeated in class; but such as they had to work out by themselves often proved a stumbling-block.

At the end of the half-hour the signal for closing books was given, and in a moment the room was a scene of confusion. Lyon waited patiently till the noise had subsided, and then rose.

'Now, boys, silence while we take the votes.'

The familiar words were greeted with a shout and a clap. Nicholas cleared the desk with a bound, and snatched up a slate.

'Shall I take the names, guv'ner, or shall us have hands?' he asked.

'Hands! hands!' shouted the boys, and Lyon nodded assent.

'Now then, boys, which is it to be?—games, or this new book I have here?'

'Wot's the book about?' asked a cautious lad.

'About a couple of boys something like you, something like Nicholas, and very much like the rest of you.'

'Wot's he up to? Is he a cove wot rigs out, and goes reg'lar to church, mister?' called another boy, evidently suspicious as to the moral of the tale.

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'Ah, you are a new boy, that's certain,' said Lyon. 'You have not heard any of my stories, or you would not ask such questions; would he, boys?'

'Oh, he's a muff,' said Nicholas, contemptuously. 'Put it to hands, guv'ner. I'm for the story.'

'So'm I!' was the general cry, and about thirty rough hands went up simultaneously. The question being settled, they proceeded to draw the forms in a semicircle round the fire. It was a bitterly cold night, and some of the ragged little fellows held out their hands to the welcome heat as if it were food and drink to them.

Leaving them to arrange themselves according to their tastes, Lyon went out, and in about five minutes returned with a man carrying a huge basket covered with a cloth. There was no mistaking the contents; the odour of baked potatoes made many a hungry mouth water, and some of the smaller boys nudged each other, and laughed with delight.

'I know'd the guv'ner was up to something,' remarked Nicholas, who usually professed to know more than anybody else. 'I knowed by the very look in his eyes. Bless yer, I knows our guv'ner.'

'Are we to eat as many as we likes?' whispered a little pale-faced lad, gazing in ecstasy at the piled-up basket.

'Bless yer, yes,' said Nicholas, in a tone of lofty superiority. 'We don't do things by halves here, young un. We gen'ally has a spree once a month—hot taters or summut else, as it 'appens. You can eat till yer jaws ache, and then have some more if yer likes; we ain't pertic'lar to a few.'

The bigger boys had drawn the forms as closely to the fire as possible, while the smaller ones sat on the floor in groups. They all looked happy and expectant, the hungry expression on some of the pinched faces telling of long fasting.

The supply of potatoes seemed unlimited. Nicholas and another lad, directed by Lyon, handed them round, and the rapidity with which they disappeared was marvellous. As soon as one basket was empty another appeared, until even Nicholas, whose appetite had seemed insatiable, declared himself satisfied.

While the boys were engaged with the potatoes, Lyon narrowly watched the lad Willie Winter. He saw that he would eat nothing, and evidently watched his companions with a mixture of restlessness and contempt; he was ill at

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ease, and, judging from the frequent glances he cast at the door, would have been glad to escape. But he was hemmed in, and could not do so without attracting general attention. There was an excited look about his eyes which, in conjunction with other things, roused Lyon's suspicions, and going round to him he bent down and spoke.

'Don't you like potatoes, Willie?'

The boy looked at him and breathed hard, but did not answer.

'I suppose you had your supper before you came?'

Still no answer, and some of the boys began to laugh. Then from someone across the circle came a half-ashamed whisper, 'He's ben drinking, guv'ner.'

Lyon looked round; the little fellow who had spoken hung his head as if he had committed a crime, and all the others looked on with breathless interest. It was quite a new experience, and they waited for Lyon's next step with something like awe. Not all of them; a few laughed, and one or two looked defiant in a peculiar way, which suggested the sympathy of fellow-feeling. Lyon glanced at the laughers and they were silent; he made a private note, too, of the sympathisers, though they did not suspect it.

Turning to the boy who had brought Willie with him, he asked,—

'Why did he come?'

'I axed him,' said the boy.

'Why did you ask him when you saw the state he was in?'

The lad hung his head but did not answer; and the little fellow who had spoken before, and who seemed to know all about it, said,—

'He axed him for a lark, mister.'

'I didn't mean no harm,' muttered the boy. 'He said he'd come.'

'And you brought him to see what I would say, I suppose. Nicholas, lift him over the form.'

Willie had risen to his feet and was vainly trying to stand. The heat of the room, with the spirit he had taken, was making him insensible. Nicholas, who had seized his arm to steady him, took him up and lifted him over the form.

'Wot am I to do with him, guv'ner?' he asked. 'He's dead asleep now. Wake up, Bill,' and he shook him in the vain hope of rousing him.

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'Put him down in that corner now, and wrap my great-coat round him. There, that will do; now leave him and come back to your place.'

Willie made an ineffectual attempt to rise to his feet, and then sank back and lay still.

Lyon stood in front of the fire and looked round in silence. The faces of the boys bore widely differing expressions; some of the better disposed ones looked troubled and astonished; others looked utterly indifferent, but those which pained Lyon the most were the hard, defiant ones, who looked as if a word would rouse all the devil in them.

It was difficult to know exactly what to say, but he understood his audience thoroughly, and thought it best to speak straight to the point.

'I don't want to talk about what has just happened, lads,' he said, quietly. 'But I should like to ask you all one question. Look at Willie; now which of you would like to be in his place?'

There was a dead silence.

Lyon waited a minute, and then went on: 'How many of you have been to prison?'

Some twenty grimy hands went up.

'Did you like it?'

The question seemed to strike them as a good joke, and they greeted it with a roar of laughter.

'I suppose most of you were in for theft?'

'Yes, sir,' said a quiet-looking boy. 'We mostly gets nabbed for that.'

'But why do you steal?'

'Must live, guv'ner,' growled Nicholas.

'Is there no other way?'

The boys were silent.

'I never stole and yet I lived, and am in a pretty flourishing condition too,' said Lyon, smiling.

'Aye; but maybe you had a father to get victuals for you?' muttered a boy, somewhat sullenly, foreseeing an unpleasantly personal application of the subject.

'I earned my own living before I was as old as you. But before that my father certainly did keep me. Don't your fathers keep you?'

'Not they!' scoffed Nicholas, whose father was serving out his seven years' imprisonment. 'They've got somethin'

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else to do with their money.' And he put his hand to his mouth and gestured the act of drinking.

'Oh, it is drink, is it?' said Lyon coolly. 'Drink sends you out on the streets when you are too young to earn your own living; and you take to stealing and go to prison? You have to thank drink for that, have you?'

'Not all on us, guv'ner,' said Nicholas, honestly. 'Some on us might ha' kep' straight, I 'spose?'

'Yes; some of you have hard-working fathers, I know. I wish their sons were like them. How many of you have been in prison for being drunk?'

Six hands went slowly up. Lyon counted them.

'There, lads,' he said, 'six of you in prison for being drunk; fourteen for theft, to which you say you are tempted by hunger, when you ought either to get food at home or be working honestly for it. And drink is at the bottom of that in most cases.'

'My father's in prison for 'saultin' the p'lice,' said a tiny little fellow on the floor. 'He can't give us no money. Mother, she says she can't get victuals for us all.'

'So you go out and pick up what you can, Benny,' said Lyon, patting the curly head. 'Well, don't steal, my boy; leave other people's things alone, and get what you can honestly. Suppose a policeman were to walk in now, what would he do?'

Some of the lads glanced suspiciously at the door as if meditating a rush.

'Oh, he is not there,' said Lyon. 'You need not fear; he is a friend of mine.'

The idea of a policeman being any man's friend seemed to afford them considerable amusement. One of them said: 'He'd march Winter off though, double quick.'

'I am afraid he would want to do so. You see, lads, it is drink that fills our prisons; drink that takes away your senses, your judgment, and even your appetite for hot potatoes,' he added, with a smile. 'That is too bad, isn't it?'

He had his eye on one or two sullen faces, and saw them relax and join the general smile. The lesson had gone home, he could see, and he deemed it best to say no more. There was nothing the boys hated so much as what they called 'preaching.' Leaving the lesson to work its own result, he took up the book and was about to begin reading when a

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noise on the staircase arrested his attention. The boys started to their feet, and he saw by the expression of their faces that the supposition of a policeman's entrance was still fresh in their minds. Their fears, however, were groundless. The door burst open, and a boy rushed, breathless, into the room.

'There's a fire in Thurnall-street, Mr. Lyon!' he panted. 'Mrs. Ripon sent me to tell you; she wants you to come.'

In a moment the circle was broken up, and dashing over forms and tables, the boys made for the door. The attraction of a fire was greater than that of the most fascinating book, and Lyon was left alone with the sleeping boy in the corner.

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CHAPTER IX.

SAVED FROM THE FIRE.

SOMEWHAT perplexed, Lyon stood over his inconvenient charge. He did not like to leave him there alone in his present state, not knowing how soon he might awake. The woman who lived below came in to put out the fire, thinking all were gone, and seeing the boy, exclaimed,—

'Dear me, Mr. Lyon! what is the matter, sir?'

'He is asleep; will you look after him?' he replied. 'Let him sleep as long as he likes.' Stooping down, he glanced at the handsome little face in the deep sleep of intoxication, and then, with a deep sigh, went out.

People were rushing by in the direction of Thurnall-street, and he followed. A lurid glare in the sky showed that the fire was making rapid progress. He hurried on, and was soon in the midst of the excited crowd, fighting his way towards the burning building, but the dense throng blocked the entrance of the street, and he could not get near. Seeing that all efforts were vain, he turned into a street that ran parallel. Here all the inhabitants were in a state of frantic alarm, and without difficulty he entered one of the houses, and climbing a wall in the rear, found himself in a back yard, and in another minute he was in Thurnall-street close to the burning building. It was the one in which Mrs. Ripon and Gower lodged; and seizing a woman who ran shrieking past, he asked if they were safe.

'She's safe, and the child; they're at Smith's,' she answered, tearing herself out of his grasp.

A policeman stood near, and he turned to him; 'Has Mrs. Ripon both the children?'

'She has two little girls and an old man, sir,' said the man, recognizing him. 'Were there any more?'

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'No,' said Lyon, with a feeling of relief; 'not with her. Have you seen a tall, thin man, a young fellow? Are they all out?'

'I suppose so, sir. I haven't been closer than this; this is my post. I heard someone say they were all out?'

Only half satisfied with this vague answer, Lyon pushed his way on.

So rapid had been the progress of the fire that no fire-escape had reached the spot, though the sky was red with the light from the flames. A little wooden shed in the rear was blazing fiercely, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring premises were removing their goods to a place of safety.

A man, seeing Lyon, stopped. 'We shall have the whole street a-fire afore those blessed engines come, sir!' he cried.

'The man who lodged on the third floor; is he safe?' cried Lyon, trying to make his voice heard above the roar of the fire and shouts of the people. 'Here, Martin, you know him, where is Mr. Gower?'

The man stared at him. 'Isn't he out, sir?'

'I don't know. Who can tell? Who has been here?'

'I have been here since the first alarm; I haven't seen him,' said a boy.

Someone caught up the words, and repeated them with embellishments, and the cry ran through the excited throng, 'There's a man left in! There's a man burning to death!'

And then someone added, 'Drunk.'

All communication with the upper floors by means of the staircase was cut off, and the flames were already licking the window frames of what had been Mrs. Ripon's room. The house was very old, and burned like tinder.

Lyon dashed at the doorway, but one glance at the burning staircase showed him that there was no probability of ascent. Half-suffocated by the smoke he turned back just as a fire-escape came tearing round the corner. The crowd made way, and breathless with suspense and excitement, watched the men fix it before the house.

There was not a moment to be lost; already the flames were rushing out of the right hand upper room, and the falling bricks and timber made proximity to the building a position of danger.

With only one thought, that of Gower lying senseless in the midst of the fire, Lyon mounted the escape, and with the aid

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of one of the firemen entered the third floor window. The room was full of smoke, and as he stumbled across, the door cracked, and a tongue of flame licked through the crevice and mounted the hot beam.

Fortunately he knew the arrangements of the room, and went straight to the bed. Stooping down, he put his hand on Gower's face. He was there, then, and without an attempt to rouse him, he took him in his arms and went straight to the window.

A loud crash behind him forced him almost involuntarily to turn his head. The bed had disappeared; the floor had given way beneath it, and it was precipitated into the ruin below. As the flames rushed up through the chasm, they met the flames curling through the burning doorway, and a second loud crash warned him that not a moment was to be lost.

Gower lay in his arms like a log, and he got him through the window with difficulty. The fireman took him and passed him down to another, shouting to Lyon to follow.

The flames were now travelling round the machine, and the danger was imminent. The crowd shouted to them to hurry down, and in their terror and excitement became frantic. But by some unaccountable means Gower's progress through the machine was stayed, and, seeing the flames darting from the house and enveloping it, the alarmed spectators seized it, to drag it away from the building.

Seeing what they were doing, one of the firemen shouted to them to desist, but it was too late; as they moved it, the escape suddenly broke in two and fell to the ground, carrying the four men with it.

Lyon remembered no more. When he came to himself he was lying in a hospital whither he had been carried and a doctor was examining him for broken and dislocated bones.

Happily there was no serious damage done. A few bruises and a severe shaking were all the harm he had sustained, and he was able in a couple of days to go home. He was very anxious about the other sufferers, one of whom, a fireman, was in the next ward. The other had been taken home, not being much injured.

To his surprise no one could tell him anything about Gower. All he could learn was that he had been carried to a neighbouring house, and attended by a surgeon; that he had sustained no injuries, but, with the proverbial good fortune of drunken men,

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had escaped unhurt. The next morning he had left the house, and no one knew anything more about him.

Mrs. Ripon was the greatest sufferer; not only was nearly all her furniture burnt, but on going back to fetch the child Sybil, the fire had caught her arm, and she was disabled for work. Lyon went to see her, and found her as unlike the cheery little woman of former days as possible.

'It isn't for myself, sir,' she sobbed; 'but I can't bide for father and the children to go into the house!'

'Who says they are going?' asked Lyon.

'The neighbours say they *must* go; there ain't no one to work for them and keep them out. Mrs. Smith is very good and kind, but we can't stay here much longer; she's a poor woman herself.'

'Have you had any help, any money from the fund? There was one raised for those who suffered.'

'Yes, sir, but not much; it's all gone. I'm to have some more to-night. But lor, sir, a fund like that don't last long, and what I'm to do I don't know.'

'Have you never been in trouble before, Mrs. Ripon?'

'Oh, sir, lots of times,' she exclaimed, surprised at the question.

'And how did you get out of it?'

She saw his meaning now. 'I was helped,' she answered humbly. 'I know I ought to have had more faith, Mr. Lyon, but it's hard work when I see everything gone, and me not able to work.'

'And the neighbours all talking about the house,' said Lyon, pleasantly. 'It is too bad of them, Mrs. Ripon, but you mustn't give way to them. Tell them you are going to get well, and make a home better than the last. You will do it yet.'

He knew what a horror the respectable poor have of 'the house,' and could see that the fear of it was weighing upon the little woman's spirits and bearing them down to the ground.

'It is all nonsense about the house,' he said, and she listened to his words as if they were gospel. 'You make haste and get well, and I'll see about the rest.'

She was content then; his word was law; and his very voice to her a prophecy of good. She brightened up at once, and he left her hopeful and cheerful.

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The neighbours had the children, and as he passed down the street he saw Katie sitting on a doorstep eating bread-and-treacle. He stopped and spoke to her, and asked where Sybil was.

'She's gone with Willie,' said the child.

'Who's Willie?'

But Katie shook her head; that question was beyond her small comprehension.

A woman in the next house came to the door, and answered it: 'It's that young rascal of Mrs. Winter's,' she said, angrily. 'I told him if ever I see him round here again I'd box his ears, and I will too, the little villain!'

'Has *he* taken Sybil?' asked Lyon, in surprise.

'He's always taking her; he's took a fancy to her and the child to him, more's the pity; he'll do her no good; the drunken little scamp! I wish I was behind him now, I do.'

It would have fared ill with the boy if she had been behind him within reach of his curly head. Lyon knew the woman well; a regular virago when put out of temper, though in the main kind-hearted enough, as Katie and Sybil could testify.

He walked on, puzzling over this new phase in the boy's character. He had never seen him take any notice of the children, whatever, except to tease one occasionally. There was a wood-yard at the corner of the street, and as he passed the gate he heard a merry outburst of childish laughter. He knew the voice at once, and pushing open the gate went in. Walking down between the rows of planks, he suddenly stopped. The two children were ensconced in a snug corner behind the planks amid a number of old logs. The sun was shining straight upon them, and Lyon thought he had rarely seen a prettier picture. The boy was lying full length on a log, looking up to the sky, with his hands clasped beneath his head. Sybil had scrambled up a heap of logs behind him, and was touching his face with a shaving, bursting into a fit of childish laughter every time he shook his head with pretended anger and wrath.

Neither of them saw Lyon, and he stood watching them in silence.

'Is baby tired?' said Willie, as the child stopped playing, and leaned against the log. A curious change had come over her face; all the life and merriment had gone, and the blue eyes were full of a strange wistful melancholy. Mrs. Ripon

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had told Lyon of these 'melancholy fits,' as she called them, which were wont to come over the child, but he had never seen one before.

Willie raised himself on his elbow, and looked up. 'What's the matter, darling?' he asked, lovingly. 'Is my baby tired?'

'Thybil not happy,' said the child, with suppressed sobs. 'Thybil wants to go to God.'

'What, and leave Willie! Baby doesn't want to go and leave Willie all by himself,' said the boy, taking her in his arms and rocking her to and fro. 'Willie will cry if his baby goes.'

'Willie come too.'

'No, Willie can't. Hush, my darling; don't cry. Would baby like a cake?'

At this sudden bright idea the child stopped crying, and held up her face for a kiss.

'Thybil will be happy with a cake,' she replied, with childhood's happy forgetfulness of care; and the two children went off hand in hand.

Waiting till they were out of sight, Lyon went on his way somewhat perplexed.

'It may be that *He* is using her,' he mused; 'and if so, what right have I to interfere? I never saw the boy so gentle, so boylike before; it shows that he is not dead to all feeling, poor little chap! I must wait and watch.'

He laid Mrs. Ripon's case before the proper authorities, and obtained for her from the fund a sufficient sum to enable him to hire and partly furnish three small rooms. Rose, who was nursing her, was to share them, and by putting their earnings together, they hoped to manage well.

'You've no idea how good she's been to me,' said Mrs. Ripon, her eyes full of grateful tears. 'She's a born nurse, Mr. Lyon; and she has been like a sister to me. If she would stay with me and let us work together, I'd be thankful to have her.'

And when she mentioned it to her, half afraid she would say no, Rose burst into tears and hysterical sobs, and could not speak, but her silence was construed aright, and the arrangements were made accordingly.

It was a sore trial to the tidy housewife to lose all her household treasures. The new rooms looked very bare, and if it had not been for a good fire would have looked comfortless too. But as it was, a cheerful blaze greeted them and gave them a homely welcome.

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The children were bundled up in shawls lent by the neighbours, and as Rose unrolled Sybil, Lyon took the child on his knee. She was shivering with cold, and he saw that her little bare toes were peeping out of her shoes. Her frock, too, was ragged, and one shoulder showed white and cold through a large hole. Katie was in as bad a plight.

'Are these the only things the children have to wear?' he asked.

'Everything was burnt, sir. I saved them in their night-gowns, and the neighbours gave them what they have got on now. It don't hurt Katie, but baby have got a nasty cough.'

'Your own things were burnt too, were they not?'

Mrs. Ripon looked ruefully at her worn, shabby dress. 'This one's Nancy's; she lent it me.'

'Nancy!' said Lyon, surprised.

'A friend of Rose,' she explained; 'she's been wonderful kind, and lent me some boots, too, though they ain't much 'count.'

'Shoes and socks and frocks,' thought Lyon, as he walked home; that is a woman's province, not a man's, I don't understand such things. I wonder who would take it up and do it. I wonder if Miss Wycherley would.'

He had taken advantage of his dinner hour to see Mrs. Ripon into her rooms, and all that afternoon he turned over ways and means in his mind. It was at such times as this that he chafed at his position, and felt the bitterness of comparative poverty. No one knew better than he how to make a little go a long way, and he did wonders with what he had. Systematic in all his habits, he knew exactly how much he could spare, and that he had given already; to give more to Mrs. Ripon would be to rob others.

His mind was made up by the time he left business; and hurrying over tea he went to Highbury. It went against the grain to do it; he would far rather have paid for the things out of his own pocket; but in the first place he could not afford it, and in the second he had promised to ask Mr. Wycherley's aid when he had a specially necessitous case, and John Lyon always kept his promises.

As he rang the bell, it suddenly struck him that he ought to have brought a card, a thing he had never yet needed, and therefore did not possess. To his own surprise he felt annoyed, and then smiled at his weakness. 'I make no profession of

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belonging to their order,' he thought, 'they must take me as I am, a cardless, and therefore, I suppose, uncivilized individual.'

The servant ushered him into a room, and evidently recognising him, went away. He heard her open the drawing-room door, and the sound of voices was distinctly audible.

'They have company; then I shall only see him,' he thought. 'Perhaps it is as well; she might not like the idea of actual work.'

The servant came back and asked him to walk into the other room, and, somewhat reluctantly, he went.

Mr. Wycherley rose to meet him, and greeted him courteously; his daughter, standing by the table, slightly bowed, and continued her conversation with a handsome, gentlemanly man, who was listening to her words with laughing incredulity.

Mr. Wycherly handed his guest a chair and proceeded to talk of the weather and other equally interesting topics. Evidently an introduction to his aristocratic-looking friend was deemed unnecessary.

'I have been laid up with a severe cold all the week,' he said, in answer to Lyon's question as to his health. 'I am ordered to keep in one atmosphere, and not risk the draughts in the passages.'

'Which accounts for my being asked in here,' thought Lyon; then he said aloud, 'When I was here you expressed a wish that I would let you know of any particularly necessitous case that came under my notice; that must be my apology for calling to-night. My time is occupied nearly all day.'

'Pray don't apologize; I am delighted to see you,' said Mr. Wycherley, with evident sincerity. 'Anything I can do to help anyone in need, I am sure I shall do most willingly.'

'It is one of the sufferers in the Thurnall-street fire,' explained Lyon, and then he gave an account of Mrs. Ripon's need, in as few words as possible.

While he was speaking, he was conscious that Miss Wycherley was listening, though she still carried on a conversation with Mr. Randolph, as he heard her call her guest.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mr. Wycherley, 'a very deserving case indeed, a very deserving case. I shall be most happy—Alison, my dear, where is my purse?'

'Did you say that this poor widow has adopted a child?' asked Miss Wycherley, addressing Lyon for the first time.

'It was left at her door,' he answered.

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'How very extraordinary! but I suppose it is really a neighbour's child?' said Mr. Wycherley.

'No; it is a child of unusual beauty; certainly no working man's child.'

'And have they no clue to its parentage?'

'None whatever; Sybil herself is too young to know anything.'

'Sybil, what a pretty name!' said Miss Wycherley, leaning over the back of her father's chair. 'Is she dark or fair, Mr. Lyon?'

'Fair; a regular little Saxon. I was hoping to interest Miss Wycherley in my little friends.'

'What can I do?' she asked in surprise.

'That I must leave to you. The children have nothing to wear except rags, neither has the mother. Such things as frocks and pinafores are out of my province; it is woman's work.'

Alison slightly coloured. 'He might at least have said "lady,"' she thought. 'He is very brusque and uncultured.'

'Were you the—the person who rushed to the rescue and saved a drunken man?' said Mr. Randolph, drawing near, and speaking in a tone of supercilious condescension.

'I was that person,' replied Lyon, coldly, unconsciously laying a sarcastic stress upon the word *person*.

Mr. Randolph coloured and drew back, and there was a mischievous gleam of amusement in Alison's eyes.

'Were you injured?' asked Mr. Wycherley, with interest.

'No; only a few trifling bruises; nothing to speak of.'

'I should like to see that little child; couldn't you bring her here, Mr. Lyon?'

'A little bundle of rags, even though surmounted by a mass of golden curls and a pair of eyes as blue as—your own,' he was going to say, but stopped himself just in time, and added—'the sky, would be a nice visitor to bring here, Miss Wycherley.'

'If you want to see pretty children of the lower order, Miss Wycherley, you should go to the Foundling Hospital,' observed Mr. Randolph.

'I have been, and they are not very pretty. Could I come and see Sybil, Mr. Lyon?'

'My dear!' exclaimed her father, 'what will you want to do next? Go into those wretched dens! they are not fit for ladies.'

'Indeed, Miss Wycherley, you must not think of such a thing,' urged Mr. Randolph, with an expression of annoyance; 'you have no idea what fearful places they are.'

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'Have you ever been in them?' asked Alison, saucily.

'Yes—no; that is to say, I have looked down some of the courts and alleys, and they are enough to make one shudder. They are a disgrace to the nation.'

'And therefore no one is to go near them,' said Lyon. 'That is a curious method of curing an evil—leaving it alone.'

'There is a great deal too much fuss made with and about the lower orders,' said Mr. Randolph, haughtily. 'They are a rough, brutal set, the very dregs of society, and there is no hope whatever of raising them.'

'Have you ever attempted the task?' asked Alison, with laughing eyes.

'It is too bad of you to laugh at me,' he said, in a low reproachful voice. 'I am only anxious for your welfare.'

Lyon heard the words, though Mr. Wycherley was speaking to him at the time, and he marked the colour flush to Alison's face as she turned abruptly away.

'I suppose Mrs. Ripon—is that her name?—will not keep the child always. If she could get it into an Asylum it would be a good thing. Unfortunately we have no influence in London; we are strangers, and know no one.'

'It can be done if you wish it,' said Mr. Randolph; 'I have influence, and some votes for an orphan asylum. Will you put it in my hands, Miss Wycherley?'

'I have nothing to do with it; the child is Mr. Lyon's *protégée*,' she replied, coldly; 'I should like to see her, Mr. Lyon, and if I am not to come to her, she must come to me. Will you send her here to-morrow?'

'But if she lives in those dreadful places,' interposed Mr. Wycherley, nervously, 'is it quite wise, my dear?'

'The haunts of fevers,' said Mr. Randolph.

'Are there any fevers there?' asked Alison, with a glance at the latter speaker.

'No,' replied Lyon, briefly.

'Would it be perfectly safe to bring her here?'

'Perfectly safe.'

'Then please send her to-morrow.'

He believed she said it chiefly to show her resentment of Mr. Randolph's evidently unwelcome interference; but that was no business of his, and promising to bring the child himself the next day, he took his leave.

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CHAPTER X.

ALISON AT HOME.

'BUT she hasn't a decent thing to go in, Mr. Lyon,' said Mrs. Ripon, in alarm.

'If she had there would not be much need for her to go at all. It is just because she has no decent things that I am taking her,' explained Lyon, who had called to take Sybil to Highbury. 'Miss Wycherley has promised to get some clothes for both of them; what fits one will fit the other, I suppose?'

'As near as a touch, sir,' replied Mrs. Ripon, who was troubled with no feeling of jealousy that it was Sybil and not Katie who had been asked for. Indeed, it seemed the right and natural thing that the motherless little one should be thought of first; her own Katie had her mother to work for her. So she washed and brushed the child, and rolled her up in an old shawl, a borrowed one, and gave her to Lyon.

It was a bright frosty morning, and at first the child trotted along by his side merrily enough, but presently he heard a little suppressed sob, and looking down, saw two big tears rolling down her face.

'What is the matter, dear?' he asked in some concern. 'Are you tired?'

'I've dropped my shoe!' she sobbed, piteously, holding up one little bare foot.

Lyon looked back, but there was no shoe to be seen. There was nothing for it but to pick up the child and carry her, which he did, with a smile at his own expense. As he walked on, a familiar voice by his side said,—

'I'll carry her for you, sir, if you like.'

'Thank you, Willie, but I am going to put her into an omnibus at the corner,' he replied, kindly.

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The boy looked disappointed, and fell back. Lyon stopped, and waited for him to come up, and then said,—

'If you are here in about two hours' time, my boy, you may take her home.'

'All right, Mr. Lyon, I'll be here,' replied the boy, his face brightening.

Looking over Lyon's shoulder, the child laughed and threw him a kiss. 'I'm going to thee a pretty lady,' she said, proudly; 'I'm going to have thome new frocks and things.'

The boy stood still and watched them out of sight, with a wistful look in his eyes. 'I wish she was my own sister,' he muttered, rebelliously. 'I guess Mr. Lyon won't let her come with me any more, and if she was my sister he couldn't help it. It's a shame.'

He turned sullenly away, and joined a group of boys about his own age, who were standing near. They were ragged, half-starved looking little fellows, some with fusee boxes in their hands, others with blacking.

'Here, Bill,' said one, 'what's the end o' that tale? I've been telling 'em up to last night. Did he kill him?'

'You tell it!' said Willie, contemptuously. 'A nice mess you made on it, I'll be bound!'

'Well, tell it 'em yourself,' retorted the boy in an aggrieved tone.

'I never tell tales; I read them,' said Willie, loftily.

He was evidently held in some estimation by his companions, among whom he was a sort of leader. They admired his daring and pluck, as they called it; and then he could read and write, accomplishments which the sharp, quick-witted boy had picked up in some strange fashion of his own. He was in the habit of reading aloud to his less fortunate companions the more than questionable literature which abounded in the cheap book shops, and of which he always had a stock. The adventures of Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard, and other equally worthy and notorious characters were eagerly listened to by his admiring and envying circle, and to emulate their daring exploits was the cherished dream of many an embryo burglar.

This craving for sensational literature was well known to Lyon, and he did all in his power to satisfy it. Boys who can read will read, and if they have not suitable literature will greedily devour unsuitable; therefore John Lyon's shelves abounded with such books as 'Robinson Crusoe,' boys' maga-

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zines, tales of travel and adventure, all of them interesting, but good and pure in tone. Not one book was admitted to his library without being first carefully read, and one dubious sentence or doubtful sentiment was sufficient condemnation. His boys knew his dislike and disapproval of their current literature, and the better disposed among them gave it up, and were content with what he supplied.

Knowing this, though he was not one of Lyon's boys, Willie's eyes rested upon a new face in the group; one he was not accustomed to see in such company. It was that of a delicate little lame boy, a blacking seller, and a great favourite with John Lyon; one of his tractable, patient boys, who really tried to keep straight and do their duty. He was listening eagerly to the conversation, and Willie nodded at him.

'Has he been listening?' he asked, a sudden thought presenting itself. 'Look'ee here, you all meet me to-night, an' I'll read it to you. *He* can't tell it as it's written! It's a jolly sight better'n he told you; it's all about a cove as got nabbed, and how he 'scaped. I tell you, it is something like a story.'

The boys readily agreed, and settling the time and place of meeting, Willie sauntered off, his hands in his pockets, and an evil smile on his handsome little face.

'I'll pay him out,' he muttered. 'I'll show him what his good boy can do. I'll teach him to come a-interfering with me.'

And brooding over a scheme of revenge which was to punish Lyon for his supposed interference, he tried to drive away the recollection of the kindly smile and pleasant words which so persistently haunted him.

Arrived at Mr. Wycherley's with his little charge, Lyon was ushered into the library. At the sight of the blazing fire, Sybil clapped her hands with delight; she had not often seen such a fire. As she stood before it, Miss Wycherley came in with her father, who was muffled up in wraps and comforters.

'I am obliged to be careful,' he said, as he shook hands. 'Will you oblige me? thank you.' And Lyon helped him to unroll himself. He was so engrossed that for a minute he did not notice the child, who stood looking at him with awe-struck eyes.

'Is this little Sybil?' said Alison. 'You poor little thing! where is your shoe?'

'She dropped it,' said Lyon, 'and, to judge by the other, I am inclined to think the loss is not so very great.'

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Sybil silently held up the despised shoe for examination, and Alison looked pitifully at it.

'No shoe, and such a day as this!' cried Mr. Wycherley, shocked. 'Dear me, what a lovely child!'

'Papa, she is perfect!' cried his daughter, enthusiastically. 'Her face is that peculiar oval so seldom seen; and look at her eyes!'

He had a good view of them, for the child was gazing at him as if fascinated.

'Go and speak to the gentleman, Sybil,' said Lyon.

She advanced a step, and then stood still and burst into tears. Alison caught her up in her arms and tried to comfort her, but she would not be quieted till Lyon took her. She said she was 'fightened,' but they could not make her say what frightened her. Mr. Wycherley looked discomfited and annoyed.

'What did I do?' he asked. 'Why should she be frightened? Children are not generally afraid of me.'

'It is all strange, and she is timid,' said Lyon, apologetically. 'Look up, Sybil. This is the lady who is going to give you a pretty frock.'

The child looked up. 'The pretty lady?' she said, inquiringly; 'Mr. Lyon thaid it wath a pretty lady.'

Lyon felt a most unwonted flush rise to his face, and he stopped the child sharply, 'Little girls must not talk too much.'

'What did she say?' said Mr. Wycherley. But neither his daughter nor Lyon chose to repeat it.

Binging for some cake, Alison soon coaxed the child out of Lyon's arms, and took her out of the room, and when they returned in about half an hour, Sybil was metamorphosed. All her own rags had been taken off, and she was dressed in pretty but simple clothes, which set off her marvellous beauty.

'Heyday! what little lady is this!' said Mr. Wycherley, in astonishment. 'It seems to me that little Cinderella has found her godmother. Dear me! what an extraordinary style of beauty for a poor man's child!'

'She is no common man's child, papa; I am sure she is not. Is she, Mr. Lyon?'

'I think not.'

'But I am sure of it!' replied Miss Wycherley, positively. 'And she reminds me so of someone; I don't know who it is; there's a look about her. Don't you see it, papa?'

The old gentleman looked vaguely into the deep blue eyes.

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'She is a very pretty little girl, my dear, but I do not see any resemblance to anyone we know.'

'I do not know what it is, but there is something familiar to me in her face every now and then; it comes and goes. My dressmaker has taken her measure, and is going to make some things for her and the other child. If you will leave me the address, I will send them as soon as they are ready, Mr. Lyon.'

He took out his pocket-book and silently wrote down the address, conscious of a sense of disappointment. He had hoped something more from this girl, with her frankly-expressed sympathy, than a careless order to a dressmaker. It seemed unreasonable of him, too; he had asked a certain thing, which she had readily granted. What was it to him whether she made the garments herself, or merely gave the order to another? The children had them, was not that enough? So he argued to himself, and yet the thought would come, 'I would rather she had done it herself. I would rather that she had put herself to a little personal inconvenience, it might be trouble, for these who claim her help. It is easy to give out of an abundance, and never feel the loss.' And then he blamed himself for so thinking, and said, 'If she has money to spare, why should she not spend it in this way?' But it did not satisfy him; his own life was too full of self-denial, his ideal too high for him to accept such a plea.

'And yet I have no right to judge,' he thought, glancing at the girlish face bending lovingly over the child; 'she may have denied herself in this,' and impelled by the thought, he spoke out abruptly,—

'It is not for me to thank you; the child herself does that, if you wish for thanks.'

It seemed to him almost an insult to thank her for doing what was so evidently a pleasant work, and to him a plain duty.

'I do not wish for thanks,' she said, simply; 'besides, I have done nothing to deserve them; I have only given what I shall never miss.'

'I am sorry for it. I was hoping it was a self-denial.'

She looked at him in quiet surprise: 'I do not understand you.'

'What pleasure is there in only giving what we do not ourselves want?' he asked, with a smile that changed the whole expression of his face.

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'I cannot help it; I cannot make it a self-denial if it is not one,' she replied, evidently amused at the novelty of the idea. 'Must we only do or give what costs us something?'

'That is carrying things to an extreme,' said her father, testily. 'Do you mean to say there is no merit in doing good unless we do ourselves harm at the same time.'

'When I was a child,' replied Lyon, 'we lived in Dorsetshire, in the Isle of Purbeck, and my father was a little touched with the geological mania. A geologist in the neighbourhood, an eccentric man, once brought him some specimens, and my mother expressed a hope that he was not robbing himself. "Oh, no, no! I never give away anything that is of any value, or of any use to myself," he said; "I never rob myself." We were amused, and the fossils were proportionately valued. I do not mean to say we thought the less of them, but there was no overwhelming sense of gratitude to the giver.'

'And if he had not betrayed himself you would have credited him with great generosity. What a pity he was so frank.'

'I look upon that as the redeeming part of it. If he had no generosity, he had honesty enough to own it, and did not make things worse by adding hypocrisy.'

'That would never do in the world, in society. Who is it that says that a little polite insincerity makes things go smoothly, or something to that effect? You must wait till the millennium before you can have things your way, Mr. Lyon.'

'It is not *my* way, Miss Wycherley. I claim no right to set up a standard for the world's morals; it is already done. Now, little one, are you ready to go?'

'What is the standard?' asked Mr. Wycherley.

Lyon looked at him with some surprise. 'There is one acknowledged standard,' he replied.

'Oh, yes, yes, I understand; the Bible, of course. I did not catch your meaning,' said Mr. Wycherley, hurriedly; 'of course it should guide us.'

The words sounded forced and unnatural, and after them there was an uncomfortable silence. Lyon saw that an unpleasant chord had been touched; saw it in Mr. Wycherley's nervousness and in his daughter's slightly heightened colour and curl of the lip.

'Such bad taste!' said Miss Wycherley, as she stood at the window and watched their departing visitors.

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'What is, my dear?' asked her father, rousing himself from a reverie.

'The way that man talked. What did he want to drag religion into the conversation for? It is the way with the lower classes, I suppose.'

And she moved away with a haughty gesture, in full consciousness of her own superiority both in position and in matters of taste. There was more pride in the girl's nature than a casual observer would think. It did not show itself in the small way in which some pride is shown, that is to say, in keeping those beneath her socially at arm's length, in an unpleasantly conspicuous manner; but she had her own ideas, pretty strict ones, on the subject of the relative positions of the classes, and was strongly imbued with the prejudices of caste. As long as Lyon appeared in the character of an intelligent working-man seeking to raise those socially his equals, but intellectually and morally his inferiors, to his own level, she liked him, and was interested in him; but the first word that touched her sense of propriety and the fitness of things, roused all her latent pride and scorn.

'What right had he to even hint at religion to us—to you, papa?' she said, angrily. 'As if we were not better judges than he; he can only think for himself, and his standard cannot be ours.'

'I suppose he meant the general teaching of the Bible,' said her father, not in the least knowing what the general teaching was.

'Well, of course it is wrong for anyone to steal and kill, and all that; but in other things what is law for one class is not law for another. It is all very well for Mr. Lyon to work and go about among the people, but it is not our duty to do so. Now, is it, papa?'

'No, my dear, certainly not; no one expects us to do such things.'

'You see, he was not satisfied with my having things made for the children; I ought to make them myself; and I don't like work.'

The change of tone, from the indignation of the first words to the half-laughing, childish complaining of the latter, made her father smile.

'Well, well, he is a good sort of man in his way, no doubt; but he is nothing to us, my dear. I daresay we shall not see him again.'

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'But I want to,' replied his daughter, inconsistently. 'Now, don't laugh, papa; I will not be laughed at.'

'After such a tirade against his want of breeding and good taste, I did not expect to hear such a wish, my dear.'

'He interests me,' said Alison, reflectively. 'He seems so absorbed when he is here. I do not believe he cares one bit for our good opinion, papa; he says what he thinks, and does not seem to trouble about its effect on us. We must take it and make what we like of it.'

'He is very energetic,' said her father, listlessly. 'I wonder if he plays chess.'

'Nothing so frivolous. What made you think of such a thing, papa?'

'I saw him look at the board,' said Mr. Wycherley, glancing across the room to the chessboard, where the men were arranged in order; white to move, and check-mate in five moves. 'He seemed to take in the position, and it struck me he could play.'

'You should have asked him, dear,' said Alison, gently; 'it is very lonely for you now, in the evening, I know; I wish I liked chess.' And she sighed, for chess was her abhorrence, and she could never master its intricacies. It was her father's favourite amusement, and in their former quiet village home the old doctor had dropped in every evening for a game, and it had whiled away the time. Now there was only Mr. Randolph, and he did not come to see Mr. Wycherley, neither did he play chess. She went upstairs, and stood watching the dressmaker's busy fingers as they cut out the pile of little garments and placed them ready for work.

'I wonder if I can make one of these,' she said, taking up a tiny frock.

'Is it a question of *can*, Miss Wycherley?' asked the little dressmaker, with a pleasant smile.

'No; I must do myself the justice to say that I *can* make it, and what is of more importance, I *will*,' she replied. 'If I help you, they will be done sooner.'

Gathering up her material, she went down and took her favourite chair before the fire. Her father was dozing, and she was left alone with her thoughts.

Hers was a very lonely life. Shut up with her father, she knew little of the doings of the busy world without. London was a closed mystery, and she watched with curious eyes the fleeting glimpse she occasionally caught of an unknown life.

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The crowded thoroughfares were full of interest. Even the wretched little wastrels whom she constantly saw, were surrounded by a halo of romance, and dignified into something as far from the truth as it is possible for the imagination to be. She knew little of London sin, and crime, and misery. To her it was the city of wealth, and riches, and dissipation; a place to dream of by night, and enjoy by day; a region of rolling carriages, and fashion, and refinement. True, she had heard or read of another city world; of people who knew nothing of these things, and who lived in wretched dens, where the pure air of heaven rarely entered, and died amid the darkness of a life-long ignorance and sin. But she had only heard of these vaguely, and they occupied little of her thoughts; they were not of her world, and she did not trouble about them, though sometimes her curiosity was excited to know what sort of a life it must be in the courts of which she caught a passing glimpse.

John Lyon was a type of a class she had never met, and her observant nature had detected a ring of true manliness and earnestness which, in spite of herself, attracted and interested her. He was so different from all other men she had met; involuntarily her lips relaxed into a smile as she thought of Mr. Randolph and his supreme contempt for everything that did not touch the border of his own life. The lower orders, to him, were the lower orders—nothing more. He could not even spare a gleam of admiration for the *person* who, at the risk of his own life, had saved that of another man.

As this thought crossed her mind, she suddenly rose, and going to a cupboard, pulled out a number of papers. Sitting down on the floor, she ran her eye over them till she found the one with the account of the fire in Thurnall-street, and took it back to her easy chair, where she read it through. She had glanced at it at the time, but with utter indifference. Now, knowing the chief actor, she read with interest, marking each detail.

'I wonder if the man were any relative, or only a friend,' she thought, and then remembering that he was intoxicated at the time, she formed a different opinion.

'He is no *friend; he* would not make a friend of a man who could so far forget himself.'

She cut the account out of the paper, and put it in her workbasket. As she took up her work again, the words

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came to her, 'I was hoping that it was a self-denial,' and they puzzled her. 'Why should he hope it?' she said, haughtily. 'It is nothing to him. Why should I exercise self-denial at all? I have money enough to do what is required of me; and as for that, *he* has no right to require anything. I am doing it of my own free will; Mrs. Ripon and her children have no claim on me.'

No; and yet as she said the words she felt uncomfortably conscious that they were selfish ones, and her conscience touched her. She felt that there was more in those few simple words of Lyon's than she understood; that his meaning was something more than she knew—something beyond her region of thought. She dropped her work and gazed dreamily into the fire. What was it that induced such a man as this Mr. Lyon to take up such odd, unworldly ways? What did he mean by speaking of self-denial to her? It was undoubtedly a great liberty to take, and she resented it, and yet there was that in her nature which responded to the words, though she scarcely knew it. She felt annoyed and indignant with him, and at the same time conscious that he had touched a faintly answering chord.

'What are you doing, my dear?'

She started from her reverie, and looked up. 'Wasting my time, papa. I am trying to think out something that puzzles me, and cannot do it. Isn't this a pretty colour?'

She held up the little pink frock, and he assented.

'Very pretty; is it for that child?'

'Yes, or for the other one. Papa, what sect do you suppose Mr. Lyon belongs to?'

'I have no idea; I never thought even of wondering. Why do you ask?'

'I have got it in my head that he is something peculiar. He is not an ordinary Churchman, I am sure. I fancy he has some strange religious theories of his own.'

'Very likely; I was afraid he was something of a radical.'

'I don't mean that, papa,' began his daughter, but there stopped.

It was no use trying to make her father understand her thoughts and feelings on the subject; his mind and hers were of such different calibre. He would only wonder what she meant. So she went on with her work and thoughts in silence.

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It seemed very right and natural for clergymen to speak of such things as religious duties, but only from the pulpit; even they ought not to mention the subject in society. It had been decided long ago that it was bad form to do so, and Alison Wycherley, in her haughty pride, deemed the laws of society infallible. Of Christianity, as John Lyon understood it, she knew absolutely nothing. Every Sunday she and her father went to church and read the prayers devoutly, with some seriousness and attention; and they liked the clergyman to have a becoming solemnity of manner, and render the service impressively. But the spirit of Christianity, the essence of the doctrine taught, was to both of them a sealed mystery; none the less so, that they were unconscious of any mystery at all.

Willie was not in sight when Lyon alighted from the omnibus, so he took Sybil home himself. Mrs. Ripon gave an exclamation of surprise and delight on seeing the child's new clothes, but Katie's face lengthened visibly. Lyon set her little mind at rest with the promise of similar ones soon, and the two children sat down to investigate a parcel which Alison had put into Sybil's hands. There were two gaily dressed dolls and a box of chocolate, and Lyon's observant eye marked how readily Sybil helped her companion first and let her choose her doll.

'Have you heard anything of Mr. Gower, sir?' asked Mrs. Ripon. 'Rose said something about him just now—I've clean forgot what. Here, Rose!'

The girl was coming out of the inner room, but stopped, colouring painfully, on seeing Lyon. She looked wretchedly ill, and a cough shook her from head to foot as she tried to answer his question.

'Nancy told me she'd seen him,' she said, reluctantly.

'Where?'

'Down by Blackfriars Bridge, sir; he was leaning over the side,' she added in a low tone.

Lyon understood. 'Drunk?' he said, briefly; and she answered, 'Yes.'

More pained than he would have thought possible, Lyon went out. He did not know till then how strong had been his hope that something beyond the power of will was keeping Gower away, and his disappointment was keen and sore. Not only did the work of the past few weeks seem lost, but

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even the friendship which had grown up between them had fallen to the ground, and he feared it could not be raised. He knew Gower well enough to feel sure he would resent any interference, any seeking him out again, and all that he could do now was to wait and watch events.

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CHAPTER XI.

WILLIE WINTER.

AS Lyon was on his way home that night, a boy stepped to his side and began to talk.

'Mr. Lyon, I ain't a one to go in fur telling tales on another chap, but I knew you'd kind er set yer heart on that young Dick, and 'ud be sorry to see him get off the line agen.'

'So I should, Nicholas,' replied Lyon. 'I don't want any of my boys to get off the line. What is Dick doing?'

'It's that Bill Winter,' grumbled Nicholas. 'I told Dick to keep clear of him, but yer see he's such a oner fur stories, and they likes to hear 'em.'

'But what about Dick?'

'He's round at Blake's corner, listening to one of Bill's fine tales. I thought I'd tell yer, 'cause yer so pertic'lar about them books.'

'Thank you, Nicholas,' said Lyon, who knew what an effort it was for the boy to come and tell him. 'I certainly do not like my boys to read such books as Winter is so fond of. I will go round and fetch Dick.'

'Yer won't tell——' began Nicholas, and then stopped, ashamed.

'That is right,' said Lyon, laughing. 'Stop before you insult me, Nicholas.'

'I didn't mean it, guv'ner; I knew yer wouldn't tell, on'y it slipped out,' replied the boy, his rough face softening. 'Winter and me ain't friends, but I don't go in fur telling; 'tain't no business of mine.'

'I think it is business of yours to help me. Do you know I look upon you as a coadjutor.'

The boy stared. 'A what, guv'ner?'

'A coadjutor,' repeated Lyon, watching his face with amusement. 'Don't you know what that means?'

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'No, sir.'

'It means a helper. Now do you understand?'

'But I don't help *you*, guv'ner,' said Nicholas, bewildered. 'I've never done nothin'.'

'Yes, you have, and I will tell you what. You help me at the readings by being quiet and obedient. I know you are fond of a lark, but when I say, "Come boys, that's enough," Nicholas is always the first to be still.'

The boy's face flushed with gratified pride. 'You've ben good to me an' mother, guv'ner,' he said bluntly. 'I ain't a bad un at heart tho' I ain't 'un to talk, but yer've done the good thing by us and I'd like to keep on the straight, yer see.'

Lyon did see, though Nicholas was rather vague. He understood that beneath the rough exterior there was a heart capable of being touched by kindness, and that the spirit of gratitude which he had often seen in the boy's eyes, had struggled into words at last.

'Thank you, Nicholas,' he said. 'I think we understand each other. We are friends, are we not?'

'Yes, sir; leastways you are.'

'Ah, but it must not be all on one side! that will never do! You must be my friend, too, if you please. How is the box getting on? is it heavy?'

'I should jest think so!' said Nicholas, enthusiastically. 'Yer should jest lift it, guv'ner; on'y it's mostly coppers.'

'Well, you know the old saying, "Take care of the pence."'

'It takes a jolly sight o' coppers tho' to make a pound. Anyhow I ain't goin' to open it till the day.'

'That's right. Perhaps we shall find the pounds all right.'

'There's White,' said Nicholas, reflectively. 'When I tells him yer've give me a box to save up coppers to buy a donkey, he gets a box too; but he opens it every day or so to count, and sometimes he won't put a penny in 'cause he says it'll make an odd 'un. My pennies may be odd 'uns or not, but when a lot o' odd 'uns gets together they makes an even, anyhow.'

'That is just it,' said Lyon, laughing. 'Most of our odds make evens in the long run. I am waiting for some of mine to do so, Nicholas.'

The sharp-witted boy knew there was more in this than met the ear, but he did not understand what it was, so he was silent,

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'Where does Winter get so much money?' asked Lyon, after a pause.

'He sings in the public-houses, and the men give him coppers and drink. He gets a fine lot that way. Then he sells lights, and the ladies give him money 'cause of his big eyes; he looks kinder mournful, yer see, and somehow it seems to touch 'em up a bit. I can't see wot makes women so silly.'

'Oh, the men give him drink, do they?' said Lyon, enlightened. 'He doesn't buy it then?'

'Sometimes he does; I've seen him drink and throw down his money, till they collared him an' turned him out. My! he was mad.'

'I wish they would make him mad a little oftener. Where are you going?'

'I won't come no further, guv'ner; they're jest round the corner there.'

Lyon nodded and walked on alone. It was rather a quiet street, and he could hear boys' voices, though he could not see the speakers. As he turned the corner he saw them congregated at the entrance to a court, where a lamp shone overhead. He stepped under the shadow of the wall, and the boys were too absorbed to notice him.

'You see, she was obliged to kill him, or he'd have killed her; that's what I call pluck,' said Willie, in the tone of calm superiority which he was apt at times to assume.

'I don't b'lieve any girl 'ud do sich a thing,' said one of his audience decidedly. 'They ain't got pluck enough.'

'But it was murder, weren't it?' said Dick, the little lame boy, eagerly. The light shone full on his pale thin little face, and Lyon could plainly see the excitement in his eyes.

'Murder! yer little fool!' said one of the bigger boys contemptuously. 'If she hadn't killed him, he'd ha' killed her, wouldn't he? I s'pose you'd let anyone kill you without as much as by yer leave!'

'You'd better go home to your mammy,' said Winter's quiet voice. 'The next chapter's about two murders, and after that there's a splendid robbery! My! doesn't he have a run for it! And then there's the cellar where he hides, and the rats—hundreds and thousands of them!'

Lyon's face darkened; he knew the book well, as an exciting history of the adventures of a daring young burglar, crowded with incidents of a most demoralising character.

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'That is not a very pleasant book, my boys,' he said, stepping into the light. 'What becomes of the hero, Winter?'

The boy looked at him in sullen defiance, but did not answer.

'If such a man really existed, he would soon end his days on the gallows, and you would, every one of you—yes, you too, Winter—own that it was right and just.'

Most of the boys knew Lyon by sight, and one or two made a dash for the street and ran away. Dick, with a guilty look, began to creep off, but Lyon put his hand on his shoulder, and held him there.

'You like to hear adventures, boys, don't you?' he asked, with no trace of displeasure or disapproval in his voice. 'When I was a boy, nothing pleased me so much as an exciting story of adventure, and I used to save up my money to buy books. Famous books they were, too; one was about a boy no older than Dick, here, who was captured by Indians, and kept a prisoner for two years. They watched him wherever he went, but he escaped at last.'

'How?' asked one of the younger boys, listening with awakened interest.

'I do not quite remember; there was a cave on an island, I think, and he hid there for two or three months. I remember he used to go out at night and get food. One of the little Indian boys helped him, and they made the cave quite comfortable. Then when he left the island, he had to hide among the branches of a tree for some time.'

'Did they find him?' asked Dick, forgetting his fear in his interest.

'I cannot stay to tell you all, and it is a shame to spoil it by telling the end first,' replied Lyon, patting the eager face. 'I am going to read it to-morrow evening, Dick, at least part of it. You will hear it then.'

'Mayn't we hear it?' asked a sharp-featured little fellow, in a disappointed tone.

'Ask Dick to bring you to-morrow. I will let you in if he will bring you.'

'And me? and me?' asked two or three more, enticed by the prospect of a story. With a look of disdain at his recreant comrades, Willie pushed through them, and walked away. This, then, was the end of his scheme of revenge. Mr. Lyon had not only won Dick back, without a struggle, but had also taken these others, who had hitherto looked up to him as their

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liege and leader. It was a bitter mortification to this proud little fellow; he had made no secret of his dislike to Lyon, and had received an amplitude of sympathy from these very boys. And now they had with one accord gone over to the enemy, and he was left alone. Too proud to attempt a counteracting influence, he walked on, his heart swelling with indignation and anger. They had forsaken him; well, he would pay them out. Let them go to the readings by all means; they would find out some day that Mr. Lyon wasn't everybody, and there were tales as interesting as his. He'd make them repent.

As he brooded over his supposed wrong a hand was laid on his shoulder.

'Willie, Sybil and I looked everywhere for you this afternoon; where were you?'

The pleasant voice and friendly touch were more than he could bear. Jerking himself away, with flashing eyes and burning cheek, he turned round.

'Jest you leave me alone! You want me to come to your meeting, I s'pose, but I ain't such a fool. I tell you I hate your meetings, and your books and rubbish! You leave me alone, will you?'

Without waiting for a reply, he dashed down the street and out of sight. As Lyon turned in the direction of his own home a timid little voice said,—

'Are yer angry with me, guv'ner?'

It was Dick, who had crept up to his side unseen.

'Not angry, my boy; only a little bit sorry and vexed.'

'I didn't think,' murmured Dick.

'No, I don't think you did. You did not like that story, did you?'

'It was interesting,' faltered Dick, who was a truthful little fellow, and could not say he did not like it, though he knew all the time that it was not a good book for him to read or hear read.

'Do you want to hear the end of it?' asked Lyon.

'I'd like to know if he got out of the cellar with the rats. I'm so 'fraid of rats.'

'Well, he did get out, Dick, and he was not hurt at all; but he had to do a cruel thing to get out. He stabbed the man who brought him food; do you want to hear all about that?'

'Not about the stabbin',' said Dick, with an involuntary

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shudder. He was a nervous, excitable little fellow, easily frightened, and very imaginative. 'It frightens me, and I wake screaming, and can't go to sleep agen.'

'I do not like you to hear such stories, Dick; they do you harm. I can give you books quite as interesting and that will not hurt or frighten you. Now, I know you like to please me, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' said Dick, brightening.

'Well, you can do it by never listening to such tales again.'

'I'll promise, guv'ner!' exclaimed the boy, eagerly. 'I'll promise faithful, and stick to it. I allus keeps my promise, yer know.' There was not a little pride in the last words. He knew and exulted in the knowledge that his word was trusted by master and comrade.

'Yes,' said Lyon, 'you do, Dick; I wish I could say the same of all my boys. I am quite satisfied now that I have your promise.' And Dick limped home feeling proud and happy, and making many resolutions for the future. All that a little lame fusee seller could be he would be, to please Mr. Lyon, whose 'Well done, Dick,' was reward enough for the greatest effort. He crept into his bed of rags, with his heart brimming over with love and gratitude to the only friend he had in the world, and fell asleep to dream of the kind voice and pleasant smile which was lighting up his lonely path.

And the look of gratitude in the big eyes haunted Lyon, and he smiled as he thought of the lingering clasp of the dirty little fingers.

'Even the love of a little child is precious,' he thought tenderly. 'Poor little Dick! I must look after you, my little fellow.'

Dick would have opened his eyes if he had heard: he thought he was looked after; but Lyon had a special way of looking after the friendless little ones who crossed his path.

Angry with Lyon, with his companions, and with the world at large, Willie sauntered along the busy streets. With no particular object in view he wandered on, now looking in the shop windows, now listlessly watching the passers-by. He found himself at last at the foot of Ludgate Hill, and here he paused, undecided. While he stood leaning against a shop window a man came round the corner and up towards him with staggering steps. The boy looked at him, wondering why his face seemed so familiar.

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'It's that Mr. Gower that was nearly burned to death!' he exclaimed. 'I know now; him that Mr. Lyon's taken such a fancy to. They said he'd given up drink! it looks like it, don't it?'

It was painful to see such a cynical expression on so young a face; a face that had in it a wealth of glorious possibilities. The firm lips took a scornful curl as he watched, contemptuously, the futile attempts of the intoxicated man to walk steadily, and he glanced hastily around to see if a policeman were in sight.

All the way up Ludgate Hill, round the Churchyard and into Cheapside went Gower, with the boy following closely behind him. Leaving the principal thoroughfare, he turned down a by-street, and threaded his way through numerous lanes and streets, now turning to the right and now to the left without any apparent aim.

'I don't b'lieve he knows where he's going,' muttered the boy. 'He's jest walking for the sake of walking. Anyhow, I'll see where you go, Mr. Gower, 'cause your friend wants to know and I'll tell him, won't I?'

The thought was a sudden one, and immediately his resolve was taken. He knew that Lyon was trying to find Gower, and here was a chance of at least some slight revenge. He would follow Gower to his lodgings, and then it would be grand to watch Lyon in his ineffectual search, hugging his knowledge to himself the while. He got rather tired of his self-imposed task, for Gower seemed determined to lead him as long a chase as possible, and it was nearly midnight before he turned into a low, disreputable-looking lodging-house.

'A nice place for a swell,' thought the boy, as he watched him in. 'I'll keep my eye on you, sir, now, and watch you a bit. I'd a good mind to come in with you.'

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out some money. It was very late, and he was tired and hungry and cold. It was a weary, long way to his own home; besides, he did not feel inclined to meet the sorrowful look of his poor old grandmother, who was doubtless dozing away in her chair, waiting to let him in.

'I'll go,' he said resolutely, after a moment's pause. 'It's as good here as anywheres.'

He went in, and for the first time in their lives Edward Gower and Willie Winter slept under the same roof; it was not the last time by a great many.

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The next morning was cold and wet and dreary. The lodgers turned out of their comfortless beds, grumbling or swearing according to their various moods. Used to such scenes, Winter paid no attention to any but the man who had acquired an interest by the fact of his whilom friendship with Lyon. He watched him anxiously, his sharp eyes detecting the gentleman beneath the guise of wretchedness and rags, and noting the contrast between him and the regular *habitués* of the place. They left the house together, and Gower lounged languidly into an eating-house and called for breakfast. The man brought it; hot coffee and bread and butter. He drank the coffee greedily, but could not swallow the bread: he turned from it with loathing, and put his hand into his pocket to pay the bill.

Leaning against the door-post, his keen eye watching every movement, Winter saw him change colour, and look nervously round, his hand evidently seeking what was not to be found.

'He's been robbed,' thought the boy. 'Now there will be a row; he can't pay.'

Looking up at that moment Gower met his eye, and beckoned him in.

'Are you hungry, child?' he asked. 'Take that bread and butter and eat it. I've lost my money, and can't pay for it; but they'll very likely run me in for drinking the coffee, so you might as well get some benefit out of it; they can't do more for the one than the other. Eat it up, lad.'

Something in the reckless tone touched the boy's heart, seared and hardened as it was by contact with sin and misery, and rendered callous by a long experience. A strange unwonted feeling of pity sprang up within him as he looked up into the handsome face, so thin and careworn and recklessly defiant, and his eyes softened, and, to his own indignation, grew dim.

'Stop that!' he said savagely to himself, choking back an unpleasant lump in his throat. 'I'm a bigger fool than I thought! only the poor wretch is so down on his luck, and he ain't one as can rough it.'

Gower dropped his head on his hand, heedless of the wistful face beside him.

'Sir, I say, will they send you to prison?' whispered the boy, jerking his arm.

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'I don't know,' he replied, drearily. 'They've a right, I suppose.'

'But if you tell 'em you've been robbed,' said Willie, eagerly.

'Who'd believe it? I look a likely one to have money, don't I?' was the bitter reply. 'Never you mind, my boy, I must go sooner or later, so it does not matter. Eat your breakfast.'

'I say, Mr. Gower.'

Gower started and looked searchingly at him. 'How do you know my name?' he asked, suspiciously.

'I used to see you at Mrs. Ripon's place,' said the boy. 'How much is it?'

'What, the breakfast? More than I've got, and that's enough for me! They will let me know fast enough.'

'I'll fetch the money, sir,' whispered the boy earnestly. 'You jest stay here and sit still till I come. I'll be back afore you can count twelve.'

He darted off, not waiting for any reply, and Gower looked after him, scarcely understanding the meaning of the sudden exit. Putting his head down again, he sat brooding over the new prospect now opening before him. He might escape with hard words and abuse, but still there was the alternative, and he had never yet seen the inside of a prison. He had fallen low, indeed! He was herding now with thieves and beggars; his life was degraded and wretched, but even he, hardened as he was, shrank with shame and an overwhelming despair from the thought of the prison walls. He, Edward Gower, a common prisoner in a common cell! Condemned by those, once his equals, to be punished, degraded, imprisoned!

'And they call this a happy world!' he said to himself fiercely. 'They talk of everything being ruled, and so it is—by the devil! It is all a lie about God loving the world! He does not love it, or else He could not watch things going on as they do and not prevent them!'

Curious thoughts, and unusual ones for such a man; but He had been writing a sermon on the text, 'God so loved the world,' and some of his own words were ringing in his ears. He had scoffed at them while he wrote them; but they were the correct thing for the pulpit, and that was all he cared about. True or not true, no matter; he must fulfil his agreement, and write something suitable for the pulpit of modern Christianity. And now his own arguments returned to him,

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and in his bitterness he gave them the lie, and scorned himself for using them.

'Mr. Gower, sir.'

He had entirely forgotten the boy, and started at the sound of his voice.

'Here's a shilling, sir,' said Willie, eagerly; 'I got it easy. Pay 'em and get the change.'

'Pay them with your shilling, lad?' said Gower, looking at him in astonishment. 'Why should I?'

'Oh, I don't know about the why. What's the odds about why?—there's the money.'

For a moment Gower hesitated; but thinking that he could easily repay the loan, he paid the bill and walked out unmolested. Outside the door he drew a deep breath of relief, and then turned to his companion.

'What made you do it?' he asked.

'I didn't want 'em to send you to prison; 'tain't such a jolly place.'

'What do you know about it? have you been?'

Willie nodded indifferently. 'It's all very well for me; but you're different.'

'You are a sharp lad to see any difference; we are pretty much alike in outward circumstance. How came you to go to prison?'

'I was drunk,' said the boy, as coolly as if he were mentioning a perfectly natural thing.

'How old are you?'

'Eleven.'

'And I am twenty-six. I did not begin it so young as you, my lad. When I was eleven I only just knew the meaning of the word. They say a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind. Was that why you fetched the money?'

Ignoring the question the boy walked on in silence.

'I suppose it was. Where did you get the shilling, my young friend?'

'What are you laughing at?' said Willie, his surly tone implying resentment at the half-mocking words. 'You needn't make game of a cove.'

Gower put his hand on his shoulder, his manner changing.

'I'm not making game,' he said, soberly. 'You have proved yourself a friend to me, my boy. I mean the words. What is your name?'

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'Winter.'

'More like spring to me. I shall not call you Winter. Are you, like me, a homeless vagabond?'

What curious spirit possessed the boy he could not tell. Instinctively he answered, telling the truth for once, though telling it bluntly,—

'I've got a home if I like to go to it, but I don't like. I've got them as would be glad enough if I went and turned out steady; but somehow it goes against the grain, and I can't do it.'

'Against the grain! that's just it, my boy; you have hit the mark now. I believe all good is against the grain, and it's hard work trying. So you, too, have home and friends waiting for you! Strange! the same destiny, perhaps, is awaiting both of us. Here we are, victims to the same curse. God only knows what will be the end of it.'

'Rattle his bones over the stones,
He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns,'

sang a boy, running past. Willie involuntarily glanced up at his companion.

'Is that the answer?' said Gower, drearily. 'Are we to go on to that, child? Ugh! it makes one shiver to think of it—the rough coffin, and rougher hands, and a nameless grave. It would be a case of "rattle his bones" with both of us, I'm thinking. Do you know what drink does? In the long run, I mean.'

'Kills.'

'Ah, but it does worse than that first; it brings round one a phantom host, my boy, an army of memories and might-have-beens. It drags out every hope and tramples it in the dust; it mocks at your self-respect till it dies of very shame; it murders every good thought as it rises to life, and, finally, it taunts and maddens you into desperation. You don't know it all yet; you are young. Only eleven years old! O God, what would I not give to be only eleven years old again!'

There was a world of agony and despair in the words and tone; and despite the hardihood of his long apprenticeship to a callous indifference, the boy's face flushed, and he set his teeth firmly as he glanced into the worn face beside him. A natural instinct of reticence kept him silent; he felt all words of his would be an intrusion then.

Suddenly Gower turned to him, and in his old tone said

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carelessly, 'Come, one good turn deserves another. Meet me here at one, and we will dine together. I must go and get the needful—the filthy lucre, that some people are so fond of decrying. You will be here.'

'Yes, sir,' said Willie, feeling reluctant to part from the man whom he had befriended in his need. 'I don't want you to pay, though. I'll earn my dinner.'

'Very well; we will talk of that afterwards. Good morning. By the way, have you any other name? I must call you something.'

'They call me Willie at home.'

'Then keep that for home and good people; I shall not use it. I'll give you a name of my own—Robin Goodfellow—for want of a better. You might have a worse.'

He nodded pleasantly as he turned off, and Willie went his way alone with a new interest roused in his heart. A man, a gentleman once, had called him *friend*, and the novelty was pleasant.

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CHAPTER XII.

IN PRISON.

PUNCTUALLY at one Gower made his appearance at the appointed place. Willie was already there; and they went in and dined together. People stared at them, wondering who and what they were, but Gower took no heed of their curious looks. He was gloomy and taciturn, eating his dinner in silence, evidently absorbed in thought.

When they had finished he paid with a sovereign; and on receiving the change, counted out five shillings and put them before the boy.

'There you are, my lad; principal and interest. I wish I could give you more.'

For a moment the boy struggled with a sense of injustice, and a feeling of keen disappointment. Snatching up the money he flung it across the table.

'I don't want your money!' he cried, passionately. 'I never *lent* it to you! I gave it to you, and now you come an' give me all that! I hate your money.'

Gower coolly gathered up the shillings and put them into his pocket.

'Very well: don't put yourself into a passion over it: it really is not worth it. Do you expect me to take a gift from such a little ragamuffin as you?'

'You said I was your friend,' was the proud reply.

Gower gazed at him in silence. 'So I did,' he said at last; 'but is that any reason why you should not take the money?'

'If you'd given me a sixpence and I wanted to pay you back you wouldn't have taken it,' said the boy. 'Leastways not if we was *friends*.'

The emphasis on the last word showed how much he thought of Gower's careless words. Putting his hand in his pocket he drew out some money,

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I can pay for my own dinner,' he continued, loftily. 'I don't want to be beholden to you nor anyone else. If you won't let me pay for your cup of coffee you shan't pay for my dinner.'

Amused at his indignation, Gower laughed, 'You're an odd little chap! Pray, how do you get your living?'

But Willie was too offended to answer: his self-respect was wounded by Gower's contemptuous tone, and he drew himself up proudly and turned away in silence.

'Nonsense, lad,' said Gower, quickening his pace to overtake him. 'I'll take the money as a gift, so there's an end on't. Come, let us be friends.'

He was laughing, but with a merry good-humoured look in his eyes, and Willie hesitated.

'You're not making game?' he asked, doubtfully.

'Upon my word, no! here's my hand on the compact if you like, or, what is better still, we will drink to its ratification.'

A public-house was close at hand, and they went in. 'What will you take?' asked Gower.

'What are you going to have?'

'I? Oh, brandy for me.'

'I'll have the same as you,' replied Willie, elated by companionship with a man whom Mr. Lyon liked and cared for.

Gower ordered the two glasses, and pushed one toward him. 'Drink,' he said, briefly, and then turned his head in another direction; something in his face attracted the boy's attention, and he paused with the glass in his hand, and looked at him.

'What's the matter, sir?' he asked, as Gower put down his glass untasted, and raised his hand to his head.

'What is that to you?' was the sharp retort. 'Drink your poison.'

Willie looked at him wonderingly, and slowly raised the draught to his lips. Before he had time to taste one drop, the glass was snatched from his hand, and its contents flung on the floor.

'Mr. Gower!' he exclaimed, amazed.

'Get out of this place,' was the peremptory reply. 'Go this moment.'

He dared not disobey: Gower's face was dangerous. With a disappointed look at the wet floor he walked slowly out, and the next moment Gower was by his side.

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'What did you do that for?' asked Willie, as angrily as he dared.

'Because I am not quite a devil yet! Did you know what was in the glass?'

'Yes; brandy,' was the sullen answer.

'It was deadly poison! Only eleven years old, and you love it! Boy, look at me.' He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and stopped him. 'Do you see what I am?' he continued. 'Do you see these rags?' displaying a tattered waistcoat inside his closely-buttoned coat. 'Look at my face, and tell me what you see there. Speak!'

As if fascinated, the boy gazed up. 'You look like Ellis Compton the night he killed himself,' he answered, in a low tone, the words seeming forced from his lips. 'He was mad.'

'And so am I sometimes. He killed himself, did he? Was it drink that did it?'

'Yes.'

'Knowing that, knowing that drink has done this, and this,' pointing to his face and holding up a trembling hand, 'can you ask why I took the poison from your lips? Thank me for it, and go and leave me, and avoid me as you would the father of evil himself. Go, I say.'

He pushed the boy from him, but he would not go. 'I don't care about the brandy,' he said, doggedly; 'I can get more when I want it. I'd rather stay with you.'

'You will repent the day you met me. I shall drag you down with myself.'

'You can't make me no worse than I am. Ask Mr. Lyon if I ain't the biggest liar out; *he* knows me,' said Willie, bitterly, all his antagonistic feeling rising afresh at the sound of Lyon's name.

'Do you know him?' asked Gower, a shadow crossing his face.

'Yes, and hate him. He's looking everywhere for you.'

'Then he must look. Can I trust you?'

'I tell you I hate him.'

'Oh, very well; that's enough,' said Gower. He did not ask why he hated him; most likely he guessed pretty much the truth. He did not send the boy away from him again, but he took little notice of him. They met frequently, but Lyon's name was studiously avoided by both.

For some days Willie did not attempt to see his little play-

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mate. Mrs. Ripon kept a sharp eye upon the children, and they rarely ran into the court alone. Rose took charge of them during her absence from home, and they were growing fonder of her every day. She told them tales while she worked; pretty tales of the country, of green fields and flowers, of the chickens and calves and tiny birds. Her memory was full of the loveliness of Nature, and the children never wearied of hearing how the birds make their nests, and where the bees got their honey, and other strange mysteries.

And Rose seemed to find comfort in their prattle and love. It did her good to feel the little arms clinging round her neck, and the soft cheeks against hers. 'I don't feel so shut out,' she said once to Mrs. Ripon; and the little woman understood her, and did all she could to strengthen the feeling.

'There's nothing like children to cheer one up,' she thought, nodding her sagacious little head, as she saw Sybil in the girl's arms, and Katie leaning on her knee. 'Let 'em alone, bless them; they'll take some message to her. *Their* angels do always behold the face of the Father; and I believe He tells 'em more than He does us grown folks.'

One night she was ill and forced to go to bed. As she lay in the inner room, with the door ajar, she could hear the children's prattle as Rose got them ready for bed.

'Now, you must be very good children and go to sleep at once, without any noise,' said Rose's gentle voice. 'Mother's ill to-night. I'll carry you to her to kiss her, and then you mustn't speak again. Come, Katie.'

'Oh, but I haven't said my prayers!' replied Katie, in a horror-struck voice. 'I *must* say my prayers! Did you forget my prayers?'

There was a dead silence. Mrs. Ripon lifted her head to listen for the answer.

'Can you say them by yourself?' asked Rose, her voice choked.

'You must help me, you know; mother always helps me,' said Katie, somewhat aggrieved.

'Well, dear, I will try; but I don't think I can remember. How do you begin?'

'We say our text first: one we learnt this morning, you know; "I love them that love Me," that's it.'

'That isn't all,' said Rose.

'Oh, yes it is,' was the positive reply. 'Mother said that was all.'

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'There's a second part, Katie, about those that seek early.'

'No, there isn't; I'm sure there isn't. I'll ask my mother.'

'No, no,' said Rose; but the wilful little maid was on her way across the room, stumbling over her nightdress as she went.

'Mother, isn't "I love them that love Me" all?'

'You naugbty child,' cried Rose, following her, distressed.

'Never mind her,' said Mrs. Ripon, smiling at the little white-robed figure. 'That is all I taught her.'

'There!' said Katie, triumphantly.

'It is enough for once,' continued her mother. 'And it is complete in itself, Rose.'

Katie went back, docile and quiet, and was soon in bed. There was a bit of laughing and playing, and then the children fell asleep, and Mrs. Ripon dozed off. She was roused by the opening of the door, and the sound of a girl's voice in the outer room.

'What, all alone, Rose?'

'Hush, Nancy!' said Rose's low voice. 'The children are asleep, and their mother too, I think. She's been bad this evening.'

Nancy moved across the room and sat down.

'How quiet it is here,' she said, giving the fire a poke. 'Ain't you 'most tired of it? It's awful humdrum, ain't it?'

'It's quiet now, because the children are asleep; there's noise enough when they're awake.'

'Children's clatter,' replied Nancy, contemptuously. 'What are you doing?'

'Mending the baby's socks.'

'Bother the baby's socks! I've got something for you to do better than that. Look sharp and put on your bonnet.'

'I can't come out, Nancy.'

'Nonsense! You can come fast enough. Now don't talk, but come. I've got a treat for you.'

'Indeed, Nancy, I can't come.'

'Why not?' demanded Nancy.

Mrs. Ripon listened anxiously for the answer; it came at last, very low and gentle.

'Don't be cross, Nancy, but I can't come out, because I don't want to see any more of it.'

'Any more of what?'

'All the sin,' faltered Rose. 'I want to forget it.'

'What sin? Where's the sin?' asked Nancy, fiercely.

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'You're mighty good all of a sudden! Who do you suppose will forget your sin?'

The blow struck home, and, with a low cry, Rose dropped her head on her hands.

'Come, don't be a fool,' continued Nancy, relenting. 'It's only the theatre I'm going to take you to. What's the good of crying over what can't be helped? Put on your bonnet and come, there's a sensible girl.'

But Rose did not move.

'Look here,' said Nancy, suddenly, 'what's the good of your wanting to be different? Who'll believe you? I've seen girls just like you, and they tried to get back, but it wasn't any use. I tell you what it is; when folks have lost the next world, the best thing they can do is to make the most of this. That's what I mean to do.'

'But I don't want this one,' sobbed Rose, despairingly. 'I don't care for things as you do, Nancy. I want to be good.'

'I don't see as how *you* ever can be good,' replied Nancy, with cruel candour. 'You'd be a nice one to turn good! Not but what you're good enough for me. Now, come along with me; do, there's a sensible old girl. You'll feel all the better for it.'

'She'll feel all the worse!' cried Mrs. Ripon, unable to keep silence any longer.

'Oh, you're awake, are you?' said Nancy, unabashed. 'I am going to 'liven her up a bit.'

'Rose, come here.'

Rose lifted her head, but did not rise.

'Come here, Rose,' repeated Mrs. Ripon; and Rose went and knelt down by the bed. She did not speak, but silently laid her head on the pillow.

'Now, Nancy, come and talk.'

'Oh, I don't want to talk; I've got nothing to talk about. I say, Mrs. Ripon, don't you think it's a shame to keep Rose slaving away here all day? because I do, and I just tell you so.'

'Does she think so?' said Mrs. Ripon, quietly, tenderly stroking the head beside her. 'Let her speak for herself. Is it a shame, Rose?'

'It is my dear home, my refuge,' whispered Rose. 'I never want to leave it till I leave it for ever.'

Nancy was silent.

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'Stay with us, Nancy?'

'Not I! If Rose likes to shut herself up and mope to death it's her own look out. Nobody'll be none the worse.'

And with this parting thrust Nancy went off, banging the door behind her. Running down the stairs she almost fell over someone coming up.

'Now then, look alive!' she said, sharply. 'If you've got cat's eyes, I haven't.'

'What is the matter, Nancy?' asked a voice she well knew.

'It's you, is it? Nothing's the matter. Are you going up there? They're just ready for a sermon.'

'Which is more than I am. How is Mrs. Ripon?' asked Lyon.

'I don't know; go and see for yourself,' was the crusty reply. 'There's Rose killing herself; I know that much. Slaving in-doors all day with never a bit of fresh air nor one atom of amusement! She's just killing herself, and if you let her do it, you're as bad as she is, Mr. Lyon, so there!'

'Now that you have unburdened your mind, perhaps you will kindly tell me in plain English what it is you wish Rose to do,' said Lyon, with just a touch of good-humoured sarcasm.

'She says she don't want any more of this world! Such nonsense! You ought to tell her she is to go out sometimes; she'd mind you, I s'pose; most folks do, somehow,' said Nancy, grudgingly.

'Then don't you begin to set a bad example. If I tell Rose to go out with you, where will you take her?'

'To the theatre,' said Nancy, boldly.

'Oh, very well. Good evening.' And Lyon went on up the stairs.

'I thought I should catch it!' said Nancy. 'Look here, Mr. Lyon, I'll take her into the park; I'll hire a perambulator for her, dear little innocent!'

Without waiting for a reply, she ran down and went out. A boy, leaning against a lamp-post, whistled as she passed, and called after her, 'Where've you been, Nance?'

'Up to Mrs. Ripon's room,' she said, stopping. 'I haven't seen you this long time? where've you been?'

'Here and there and everywhere. What was Mr. Lyon saying to you?'

'No business of yours. I s'pose you've been in quod?'

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'Not I! I have been with a friend of mine—a gentleman.'

Nancy burst into a loud laugh. 'A gentleman! You're fit company for gentlemen!'

'Well, this is a gentleman,' replied Winter, for it was he, 'a gentleman born.'

'That's more than he'll die, if he's come down so low as to have anything to say to such a drunken little vagabond as you,' retorted Nancy, who was out of sorts altogether.

'You're too sharp with your tongue,' said the boy, offended.

She went on, and he watched her out of sight, and then taking off his boots, crept noiselessly up the stairs. At Mrs. Ripon's door he paused and listened. Lyon was talking, but he could not distinguish the words; he was speaking to Mrs. Ripon in the inner room. After listening for a few minutes he put his hand on the latch and softly lifted it. Before he had time to push the door open a step was heard on the stairs, and he drew back into the darkness. It was the old man, coming up with his arm full of papers. He went into the room and shut the door, and Willie heard him, moving restlessly about. Then Lyon came out and went down, and as soon as the sound of his footsteps had died away, he again stepped out from the recess in which he had hidden, and softly lifted the latch. But the door remained shut; he gave it a gentle push; but it did not open; it must have been locked immediately after Lyon's departure. It was of no use waiting, and he crept downstairs and out into the street, and then set off at a run.

He did not slacken his pace till he was a long distance from the court. It was getting late, and he was hungry and tired. A cook-shop, displaying its tempting viands, detained him some time; but he had no money in his pockets and could not buy. With a discontented sniff he turned away at last and sauntered on. The clocks were striking eleven as he turned down a by-street on his way home. At the other end a small crowd was collected, and seeing it he quickened his pace.

'Only a man drunk,' replied a boy in answer to his inquiry. 'They are taking him to the police-station.'

It was too common a sight to rouse any interest, but instinctively he pushed his way in to see all that was to be seen.

Only a tall, aristocratic-looking man, with torn garments and a battered hat, lying on the pavement. The boy sprang forward, but a policeman pushed him back.

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'Now then, youngster, out of the way.'

He shrank back for the moment, but followed them closely to the police-station. At the door he summoned up his courage, which was never very great when a policeman was in sight, and touched one of them lightly. The man turned sharply round.

'What do you want?' he asked, and the boy's courage began to ooze away.

'What'll he get?' he asked, pointing to the drunken man.

'Not much this time; it's only "drunk and incapable," you see. What's he to you?'

'My friend,' said the boy, with curious assumption of dignity, and the man laughed.

'Birds of a feather,' he said, lightly. 'I know you, my lad.'

'They'll fine him, I s'pose?' said Willie.

'Most likely.'

'I don't believe he's got any money. I say, will you tell him I'm here, to-morrow? Perhaps he knows where I can get the money. I'll fetch it.'

'All right; clear out,' was the curt reply.

For the first time in his life Edward Gower spent the night in a cell, unconscious of the degradation. But the knowledge of it came all too soon with the morning light. At first he could not think where he was: the past seemed a blank.

He raised his head and looked round; but all was strange and unknown. The dim, grey light of morning streaming through the barred window revealed the four bare walls and stone floor of his new lodging. At first he gazed round, with only a vague wonder as to where he was, and how he came there. His head throbbed and burned, and he felt confused and wretched, and was tormented by a raging thirst.

Rising to his feet he staggered to the door, and tried to open it. There was no handle, which excited a brief wonder; but his brain was not clear enough to connect or surmise, and he only placed his shoulder to the door and pushed. All his efforts were in vain, and at last he drew back and leaned against the wall questioning. Why could he not open the door? Like a sudden flash came the answer—Because it is locked.

A faint glimmering of the truth began to struggle through the mist that surrounded his consciousness, and he gazed stupidly up at the window, the iron stanchions of which confirmed his worst fears.

With a groan he dropped on the pallet, and covered his face

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with his hands. It had come at last—the one final step was taken, and he had touched the depth of disgrace and shame. He, the *féted* favourite of society, the brilliant, talented Edward Gower, locked in a common cell, guarded by bolts and bars, and waiting to stand before his country's tribunal.

All the horror of his situation flashed across him in a moment, overwhelming him with a flood of utter despair. It was all over now! between him and society was an impassable gulf, and his place was lost for ever. No efforts now would avail to restore that which he had forfeited, and all that was left for him was a downward path to a drunkard's grave.

Never till that moment had he known how eagerly he had clung to that one hope of a future restoration. Even when writing the stipulated columns a week for a sensational, demoralising journal, he had exulted in the consciousness that his brain was still clear and vigorous, and that if he could but overcome the great tempter, it would soon recover its old strength and brilliancy. Even when lounging over the park railings, watching with bitter envy the well-mounted equestrians, his handsome mouth had taken a haughty curve as he thought that it rested with himself to take a place among them.

So it had been, but now all was changed. This present crisis had been the one haunting horror of his life. Hardened as he was by drink, his nature was in some respects sensitive as a woman's, and the fear of a prison cell had deterred him from many an extreme.

He tried to recall the past evening, but in vain; all was a blank; he could recollect nothing. The sound of a key in the lock roused him, and a man entered, carrying a jug of water. He fixed his eyes on it greedily, and seeing his look, the man gave it him without a word. He put it to his lips, but drew back shuddering.

'Can't I have a drop of brandy, if I pay for it?' he asked, forgetting his empty pockets.

'Not a drop,' replied the man, coldly.

'I am dying with thirst!'

'Then drink that; I can give you nothing else.'

'Where am I?' he asked.

The man briefly named the police-station.

'What—what is it for?'

'Drunk and incapable, that's all. You'll get off with a small fine.'

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'If I can pay it, I suppose,' was the bitter reply.

'It won't be more than five shillings,' said the man consolingly.

'And I haven't five farthings in the world!'

'Nor friends?'

'Friends!' he echoed, lifting his head and looking him full in the face. 'Have you a friend?'

'I should hope so.'

> '"Go fetch my cloak, for though the night be raw,
> I'll see him, too, the first I ever saw!"'

was the mocking reply.

'There was a little chap outside last night, when you were brought in; he said he was a friend of yours,' said the man.

'Ah, little Robin: yes, he proved himself a friend in need once.'

'Shall I take any message to him? He's to be here this morning.'

'No,' said Gower, moodily. 'I have no message for him.'

'Haven't you anyone who will bail you out? you'll have to go before the magistrate to-morrow morning.'

'I have no one to bail me out.'

'Oh, come, surely there's someone who'll do you a kind turn. Think them over and I'll come in again directly.'

He went out, and Gower resumed his former position. To whom could he apply? He ran over the whole circle of his acquaintance, but there was not one who could or would help him. His publisher he had quarrelled with, so it was useless to think of him.

But though he persistently repeated to himself, 'There is not one,' he knew that in one direction to ask would be to have. He knew that one word to Lyon would bring him to his side, and yet he could not say that word: his pride rose up against it. What, ask a favour from the man whom he had treated with ingratitude and neglect? No: he would rather bear the utmost the law could give him in default of the fine. And yet, though he spoke thus to himself, his better nature was struggling hard for the victory; battling for the right: asserting its claim to be heard.

'Send for him,' it urged. 'Acknowledge the wrong you have done. He is too noble—too true to refuse to listen.'

Yes, he knew all that; knew that the past would be swept away as if it had never existed; that the hand of friendship

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would be gladly extended to lift him up from the depths to which he had fallen—knew it all, but could not yield.

The man came in again after a short absence, but found him still the same. He had no friends, he said; no one to whom he could apply, and the law must take its course. Perhaps he would be let off as it was the first time.

'Ah, but you've a bad character,' replied the sergeant. 'Some of the men know you as an habitual drunkard.'

The very tone, more than the words, roused all his pride and resentment, and with a haughty gesture he bade him leave the cell.

The sergeant smiled pityingly, but went without a word, and he was left alone with his thoughts.

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CHAPTER XIII.

GOOD OR EVIL?

THE day wore slowly on. Each hour seemed longer than the last, and the fog grew denser and darker. Gower still remained in his cell. They told him he might go into another room if he liked, but he said he preferred staying where he was, alone, and they left him.

Willie was at the door early, waiting for some message; but he waited in vain. The man to whom he had spoken the previous night came out and sent him away, saying there was no message. He went away feeling disappointed and undecided, wondering what they would do to Gower. Not feeling in the mood for his usual occupations, he strolled down to Abbey Court, where Mrs. Ripon lived, and kept a sharp look out for Sybil. She was not in the court, but as he neared the door he heard her voice chattering to Katie. She was sitting on the stairs nursing a doll with a funny little motherly air, irresistibly amusing. At first he could scarcely believe it was his old playmate, she looked so altered, so changed. Instead of the tattered little cotton frock, she wore a bright blue stuff one, and a spotless white pinafore. Her feet were encased in woollen socks and shiny new shoes, and a warm soft jacket covered the pretty little arms and shoulders.

Willie whistled. 'That's *his* doing,' he muttered, a sullen look clouding his face. The children were too busy to notice him, and he stood watching them in silence. At last he stepped into the doorway and spoke coaxingly.

'Will my baby come for a little walk with Willie? Such a nice walk.'

He put out his arms to take her, but she drew back with an ominous knitting of her brows.

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'Doesn't Sybil know Willie?' continued the boy persuasively. 'Come and see what we'll find down by the pretty water.'

He put his hand on her arm as he spoke, and was immediately rewarded by a vigorous slap.

'Go 'way,' said the imperious little lady; 'your 'fings are tored and old. Thybil won't go with you. Go 'way, dirty boy.'

He flushed to the very roots of his hair, and drew back as if he had been stung.

'My mother says you're a naughty boy,' said Kate gravely; 'you mustn't come here.'

He drew a long breath and turned away, but suddenly came back.

'Willie loves his little girl: won't she come with him and buy a cake?' he said, with a yearning look in his large dark eyes.

At the word cake the child looked undecided, but only for a moment. 'You'll dirty my new f'ock: go 'way,' she replied, decidedly, and he went without another word. But there was an evil look on his handsome little face, and the compressed lips told of thoughts and feelings hard and vindictive.

'I knew he'd do it,' he thought, bitterly. 'I knew he'd never leave us alone, though he did tell me I might take her home. What business is it of his? She ain't his child. I'll make him pay for this! see if I don't, Mr. Lyon.'

As if to answer the words a hand was laid on his shoulder, and looking up he saw Lyon himself standing beside him.

'Winter, do you know that your grandmother is dead?'

The boy started and blenched, recovering himself with an effort.

'She died last night, and her last words were a prayer for the boy who deserted her in her feeble old age.'

'She was all right the last time I saw her,' he muttered.

'How long ago?'

'More than a week.'

'She has been ill for a week. Where are you going?' asked Lyon, as the boy turned away.

'What is that to you? When's she to be buried?'

'On Friday. She has left something for you. You had better go and see Mrs. Ripon; she was with her, and knows all about it.'

'What did she leave me? She hadn't got nothing. It's no use your trying to fool me.'

'Why should I?' asked Lyon, wondering at the look of

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fierce dislike which the boy cast at him. 'She had a few little things which she valued: her Bible and hymn book, and your mother's wedding ring. You would like to have that?'

'Let Mrs. Ripon keep it till I come for it,' was the moody reply. 'I'll come and fetch it some day.'

'Do you care to come to the funeral, Winter?'

'What's the use? I hate funerals.'

'Well, they are not very pleasant things, certainly. Still she wished it, Willie.'

It was difficult to withstand the kindly voice, and there was a strange unwonted sense of desolation in the boy's heart which made him unusually susceptible. It was only for one moment, however, that he yielded to the influence; the next he dashed away a tear and with it all lingering regrets, and was himself again.

'She won't know nothing about it, so it don't matter,' he said, philosophically, and with a hardness that was only partly assumed. 'What's the odds so long as she don't know? You may keep the Bible if you like: it's more in your line than mine.'

He looked up with all the effrontery imaginable, and then putting his hands in his pockets, walked away. Lyon made no effort to detain him, he saw it was useless. It seemed as if he were never to gain any hold on this boy; kindness had utterly failed, and all he had gained for his pains was evidently a bitter dislike. And yet he was not discouraged: the boy interested him greatly, more than any other lad. He was such an attractive-looking little fellow, and with all his wickedness had in him such great capabilities of good that it was impossible to pass him by unheeded.

'If I could once get a hold on him,' he thought, looking after the forlorn looking little figure, sauntering along in its rags. 'If I could once touch his heart, there would be hope. At present he doesn't seem to have a heart, except for Sybil.'

Revolving scheme after scheme he walked on till he came to Mother Willett's door, which stood invitingly open. Before he had time to knock, a cheery voice bade him come in, and Mother Willett's rosy face appeared at the end of the passage.

'Surely the world's coming to an end, Mr. John,' she exclaimed, lifting up her hands. 'You here at this time of day! Do come in: you're as welcome as the flowers in May.'

He went in and sat down, but did not speak. There was an

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absent preoccupied look on his face which she knew well, and understood.

'He's got something on his mind, I'll be bound,' she thought, nodding her head sagaciously. 'Let him be, let him be: I know him of old.'

Replacing her spectacles, which she had pushed up on her forehead, she sat down and took up her knitting, waiting patiently for Lyon to speak. As the minutes passed and he still sat gazing silently into the fire, she began to give sundry gentle reminders of her presence; coughing, and dropping, accidentally of course, her needles. As she stooped to pick them up he anticipated her and handed them to her with a smile.

'I am ready now, Mother. I want your advice. Up with the knitting.'

With visible satisfaction and delight she took off her spectacles and put up her work, the invariable preliminary to a serious conversation.

'Would you mind leaving this house?' he began abruptly.

'That depends upon where I went instead,' was the cautious reply.

Lyon laughed. 'Of course. Now listen to me. Not far from here there is a low, disreputable alley, inhabited for the most part by thieves and bad characters of every description. Among this herd are two little lads, motherless, homeless, and friendless. They are not brothers, but chums. The mother of the one died some months ago in delirium tremens: the parents of the other died years ago; one in prison, the other in the workhouse. Both these children earn their living in the streets by selling fusees, and the one is lame and weak. A neighbour of the mother just dead, gives them house room, and after wandering the streets all day they turn in at night with a set of ruffianly, swearing, thieving blackguards who do their best to make them as evil as themselves. I have been trying hard to get them both into some Home or Refuge, but every vacancy seems filled. In one place they say, "Who nominates them?" in another, "Have they any influential friends who can obtain votes?" And so it is throughout. I am thrown on my own resources. These two are only types of a class. I have my eye now on more than a dozen lads who are trying hard to live an honest life, but who are being dragged down to the level of their surroundings. Mother, I want to save these children; how can I do it?'

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'Only by taking them right away and giving them a decent home, poor little fellows. If you can't do that I'm afraid you can't do them very much good.'

'That is just what I say. Now, the question is, what is to be done?'

'It's a question I've often asked myself, Mr. John. It fairly makes my heart ache to see the bright little lads going to ruin as fast as ever the devil can push them. It's fearsome to hear them talk round here! little bits of lads, almost babies, some of them. But then, what can a body do? there's the parents.'

'With whom we must not interfere. All we can do is to try and counteract home influence. But these children, of whom I speak, have no parents; what am I to do for them?'

Mrs. Willett pondered. 'Would it be possible to get them decent lodgings, sir, where they'd be looked after and cared for a bit?'

'Quite possible, I think; the lodgings are easily obtained, but who is to look after them? My idea is this: to hire rooms, or a small house would be better; fit up a dining-room, or eating-room, and several bedrooms. I do not want to take away the boys' independence, and experience has taught me that that which is paid for is most valued; therefore, my plan is not a free lodging. They should pay a certain sum a week, and this would teach them economy and saving habits. I would not make it a prison; they should have plenty of freedom, and plenty of fun. What I want to make is a *home*, not a refuge. Do you understand? But, of course, this scheme involves responsibilities and trouble. In the first place, I want a good, kind, motherly woman, to see that breakfast and supper are properly prepared, and to look after the home generally. Whom shall I ask, Mother?'

He bent forward and looked at her with a smile, which she knew how to interpret.

'Me?' she exclaimed, half-alarmed, half-delighted. 'Mr. John, I'm afraid I shan't do.'

'Why not?'

'I'm only a poor old woman.'

'It is just the kind, motherly old woman I want. My boys will learn to love you, and you will be in your element with a lot of youngsters to pet and play with. Who was making toffy for Mrs. Blake's boys the other day? Why, Mother,

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you are fairy godmother to all the children in the neighbourhood, good, bad, and indifferent.'

'I don't believe there are any children really bad,' she replied, sturdily. 'People don't know how to treat them. I'd tame the wildest if I only had a good chance of getting at 'em.'

'With gingerbread and toffy,' put in Lyon.

'Don't you laugh at toffy, Mr. John. If you want to make a naughty child good, promise him a regular good time at toffy-making, specially if you say almonds too. Of course I mean the littler ones. I ought to know; I've had to do with a lot.'

'I'll remember,' replied Lyon, laughing. 'Don't be surprised if I send my next relay of naughty boys to you. Now, Mother, think over the scheme of mine, and tell me when I come again if you are willing to come and look after me and my boys.'

'You! Are you going to be there yourself, Mr. John?'

'Of course; you do not suppose I am going to leave you alone to the tender mercies of such a wild young set. I mean to have my two rooms in the house and keep order.'

Mrs. Willett drew a long breath of contentment. 'I needn't think about it, Mr. John. I'll tell you now. I'm ready as soon as you want me, only there's this house and the lodgers.'

'I'll see about that,' replied Lyon, who knew where he could find someone glad enough to take it off her hands. 'You don't do much more than keep yourself and cover the rent with your lodgers now, mother, and if you come to be my housekeeper you will have no expenses in that way, and will have a settled salary, so you will be able to save.'

'I don't want to save, Mr. John. I don't feel as if 'tis right to put by money when so many are starving. Seems to me that if I look after other people's to-days God will take care of my to-morrows. But where's the money for this home to come from, Mr. John?'

'Oh, that's all settled,' he replied, lightly, 'I will come again and tell you all arrangements.'

'All settled,' she repeated, watching him down the street. 'So it may be, but out of your pocket. Eh! there will be a great reckoning one of these days, Lord. Them as gives to the poor lends to Thee, and Thou ain't one to shirk payment.'

It was not without much consideration and planning that Lyon had decided upon this step. For two or three years he had contemplated it, but circumstances had prevented his taking any action. In the first place he had not had the funds

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necessary for such an undertaking; in the second the way did not seem clear; he could not see any suitable premises. Now, however, things were different. Only the week before he had received an increase in salary, and the same day his landlady had notice to quit. Then a house, small and convenient, upon which he had had his eye, had become vacant, and, taking one thing with another, he thought the time had come for the long-contemplated step. Having made up his mind he was not one to linger and delay. The house was hired, and then he went to Mrs. Willett, with what result has been already stated.

But though he was much occupied with these new arrangements, he did not relinquish a quiet, unobtrusive search for Gower, not with the intention of in any way forcing an unwelcome acquaintance upon him, but to be ready when the time came for him to be wanted, as he felt it would do. Many a time he turned out of his path to follow a distant figure which seemed familiar; followed it sometimes into dark and sinful places, but with only the result of disappointment.

London is bad ground for the game of hide-and-seek. The chances are too uneven. Gower avoided every place, every street and thoroughfare, where there seemed any possibility of meeting him. He shunned all his old haunts, and never went near his publisher till dark. No wonder that Lyon failed to find him. He had changed his name, too, and was known at his lodgings—for he hired a room—as Thomas Smith, a common enough name, not likely to lead to discovery.

The day passed all too quickly for Lyon, whose hands were full of work; but in the dreary solitude of his cell Gower found the hours long and laden with saddening memories. He had nothing to do but to *think*, and this was to him an absolute torture. The silence was almost unendurable; but when he rose to pace the floor the soft fall of his own footsteps was worse. Memory now, which he had long trampled upon and buried out of life, rose and triumphed over him, scourging him with a thousand lashes. The past rose up before him, and he saw himself as he had been in the days of youth. Where now was the lightness of heart he carried then? Where was the buoyancy of early manhood? The future once had glowed with the rainbow hues of hope; now, where were they? What was the future to him? He dared not look at it; he shuddered at the thought of to-morrow, nay, even of to-day itself, with its weary, dragging hours! And

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beyond the morrow; what of it? Only a more reckless, speedy, onward path to—to what? He could not say; he dared not think. There were yet lower depths than he had touched.

He thought of the old home, and the playmates of his boyhood, and dreamily wondered if they too had fallen. He pictured his silver-haired father, as he had seen him a hundred times and more, leaning forward to listen with fatherly pride to his arguments with the Rector or old Sir Percival; arguments in which he always came off triumphant by reason of his ready wit and language: right did not always win the day.

What would that father say if he saw him now?

'Thank God he does not see, he does not know,' he murmured.

Then he recalled the days of his first appearance on the stage of London life; and his lip curled as he thought of the well-born women who had welcomed him to their homes and fêted the handsome, talented young barrister, for whom all prophesied a brilliant career.

'That was the first step; in their rooms I learned to love the tempter,' he said, with a groan. 'How little they knew what they were doing when they lured us on and forced upon us the curse of our lives! It was always the same—wine, wine, wine; and they vied with each other to hold out the most alluring bait. Halcott was no fool when he said, 'The women have much to answer for; they little know how much, and they care less.' And then came the thought of a pleading voice, and a pair of twining arms, and entreaties long and earnest, that he would rise above the fatal power, and hurl it down for ever. One woman, at least, had been true to her womanly instincts.

His eyes grew hot and heavy as he followed on the thought. How often had that little cool hand been laid on his aching head? how often had sweet words of loving, tender hope aroused within him a determination to battle for the victory? and, alas! how often had he failed and fallen? Fresh resolves meant but fresh defeats, and so it had gone on till even the strength to resolve had left him. Forsaken by friend and acquaintance, scorned and despised, shattered in health, ruined and degraded, he fell from the height of worldly prosperity and success to the abyss of a reckless indifference, a lost and ruined life.

The opening of his door disturbed him, and a sergeant of

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police entered. He was a fine-looking fellow, strong and stalwart, and with a kind good-humoured face. In a moment his experienced eye detected the gentleman beneath the guise of poverty, and his manner grew instantly respectful.

'Is there anything I can do for you, sir?' he asked. 'Would you like pen and ink? I can supply you with writing materials if you wish to write to a friend.'

'Thank you, no.'

'Better get someone to pay the fine, sir; it'll only be a matter of five shillings.'

'It might as well be five hundred pounds. When am I to appear?'

'To-morrow morning, sir. I'll see your case is called on first. You ain't the first gentleman we've had here, not by many a dozen. Bless you, sir, this is nothing much; there was a Member of Parliament in this very cell the other day. We have them of all classes and sorts; some take it easy and some take it hard. For my part, I'd rather see a gentleman take it hard; there's less chance of his coming here again.'

Gower listened in silence.

'If you can only get a friend to step forward and pay the fine,' continued the man. 'It isn't like embezzlement, or anything of that sort, you see; it is easy settled, and then——well, then you must be a little more careful, sir, that's all.'

Still Gower did not speak, and after waiting a few moments for a reply, the man went out. In a short time he returned, carrying a little table, which he put down, placing upon it ink, and paper, and pens.

'That little lad is out there still,' he said. 'If you should change your mind and write to your friends, he'll be ready to take it.'

The day wore on, the church clock near chimed out the hours, and daylight faded into gloom. Outside the walls Willie patiently walked up and down, watching eagerly the door. He did not know much of Gower's antecedents, whether he had friends to whom he could apply or not; but it seemed incredible that he should not have one to stand by him and extend a helping hand. He himself felt desolate and lonely. Look which way he would there seemed nothing but a dreary, dark uncertainty. He shuddered as he glanced at the cold grey walls, for despite his nonchalant admission that he had been to

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prison, and attempt at indifference, his experience of prison life had imbued him with such a horror of it, that he shunned the very sight of anything that recalled it to his memory.

As the day passed on his heart grew pitiful over the man who had not one in the wide, wide world to save him from a prison cell. In those few weeks of companionship Gower had gained a powerful influence over him; partly by the kindly confidential manner with which he sometimes treated him, partly by his undoubted wealth of intellect. Boylike, Willie was a hero-worshipper, but his idols had hitherto been taken from books. Now, he yielded undivided allegiance to the brilliant, talented man, who spoke with the accent of a higher world, and treated him, boy and Arab as he was, with pleasant familiarity and courtesy. Fallen as he was, Edward Gower retained the old chivalrous manner which had won for him the golden opinions of many a high-born circle. John Lyon had felt the influence, and not been insensible to it. The men and women amongst whom he had lived had, with their usual quick perception, nicknamed him 'Gentleman Gower,' and this lad, with all his hardness and wickedness, did homage to it. But it was not only admiration he yielded, it was something to which he was a far greater stranger—love. There was only one other in the world who had ever touched his heart, and that was the child Sybil. Now it seemed to him that she was gone from him for ever, and Gower alone remained, and he was going to prison.

He grew desperate at the thought, and began to meditate wild schemes for his release. A very forlorn and miserable little fellow he looked, leaning against the wall in the drizzle and chill of the dreary evening. The police sergeant called him in to warm himself at the fire, but he shrank out of sight as if fearing a design upon his liberty.

And while he waited Gower was having a fierce and prolonged conflict. Good and evil were battling for the victory, and in the struggle he paced the floor in a fever of conflicting thoughts. Should he yield? Should he send that word that would bring Lyon to his side? If he did, what would it mean? A renewal of their old friendship, of his own strife for self-mastery, of the old fearful warfare with the tempting fiend! Could he do it? Was life worth it? 'A thousand times "*No!*"' cried the voice of self-indulgence and an enfeebled will. 'Ten thousand times "*Yes!*"' answered the unerring voice of conscience, of right and truth.

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He went to the table and took up the pen. Minutes passed and still he held it, passive; then he wrote a line, with dazed eyes, and held it to the flickering light. No, that would not do! and the paper was torn into fragments. Another long interval of restless pacing the narrow cell, and the men outside listened with pity in their eyes.

'He's been on at that little game most of the day,' said one. 'What a fine chap he'd be in the uniform, if he was filled out a bit; he's as thin as a lath now. He's come down in the world a goodish bit.'

'Those swells do go the pace once they start,' observed another. 'He's an out and outer; he's too proud to write to any of his friends. I like his spirit.'

'I believe you,' replied his companion, significantly, and the other reddened angrily; he had attached no double meaning to the word, his predilection for which, in its other sense, was well known.

Again the shaking hand took up the pen and essayed to write.

'I was in prison and ye visited Me!' What put those words into his head? He gazed at them blankly; where had he seen them before? They seemed strangely familiar.

Then adding the name of the police-station and his own initials he mechanically folded the paper and placed it in the envelope. One minute more of hesitation, and then he dashed down John Lyon's name and went to the door. The die was cast, and he sat down to wait the issue.

Glancing at the address with an exclamation of surprise, the man went to the door and looked out. Under a lamp-post within call, stood a listless little figure which he beckoned to him.

'Here, your friend, as you call him, has written to some one worth the name of friend. Run along with this letter as fast as you can, and bring Mr. Lyon back with you.'

'*Mr. Lyon!*' echoed the boy, with a sudden sharp pang of pain.

'Yes, Mr. Lyon; you know him, don't you?'

'Yes.' That was all, and he moved slowly off with a dull, heavy weight on his heart. This, then, was to be the end of it! The friendship that he so much valued was to be broken off, and by the man he hated; he would take Mr. Gower from him, as he had already taken Sybil. The thought roused all the

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evil in him, and he clenched his hands in the helpless fury of his vindictive anger.

'Keep back the note,' whispered a voice within, and he started and grasped the paper as if he expected it to be torn from his hand.

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CHAPTER XIV.

'KEEP BACK THE PAPER!'

'KEEP back the paper!'

What was to hinder him? it was in his own possession, and could he not do what he liked with it? But suppose he destroyed it, what would be the result? Gower would probably go to prison, and hate him, as being the cause. He might say he had lost the paper; but even if that were believed the fact would remain the same. No; that would not do: he shrank from the prospect of Gower's anger and dislike, and the loss of the friendship, which was almost the only thing he prized. He dared not risk it, the penalty was too great. And yet if he took the paper to Lyon, the result would be the same as far as the friendship was concerned—Gower would never again be anything to him; he would be alienated from him, despise him, and cast him off. The one was as bad as the other.

With heaving chest and eyes gleaming with a passionate hatred, the boy stood in the shadow of a doorway. The rain was coming down fast, and he was shivering with the cold and drenched to the skin.

'I've a good mind to nab something on purpose to be took up too,' he thought, moodily; 'only he'd say I'd no business to get nabbed till I'd given up that letter. I wonder what's in it!'

The thought was a temptation: the envelope was fastened, but what did that matter?—he might open it, and then throw the envelope away, and Mr. Lyon would never know there had been one; he would not give it a thought. Yes, it was safe enough, and the next moment he stood by a shop window reading the contents.

'I was in prison, and ye visited Me.' What did it mean? He turned the paper round and round, and gazed at it with puzzled eyes. It was a queer way of asking Mr. Lyon to come and bail him out or pay the fine; he did not understand it.

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The words seemed familiar to him too, but he could not remember having heard them before. Slowly re-folding the paper, he put it in his pocket, and walked on in the direction of Mr. Lyon's home. It was some miles from where he now stood, but he did not feel inclined to hurry. Brooding over his supposed wrongs, he was in no mood to hasten the hour of his own separation from Gower.

But there was yet an alternative, and one the unscrupulous, sharp-witted boy was only too likely to think of. It came suddenly, and he seized it eagerly. Why not destroy the paper, and tell Gower he took it to its destination, and received the verbal answer, 'I am busy and cannot come'? Not only would this have the effect of keeping them apart, but it would make Gower hate the man who sent him such a message in his strait. It seemed to the boy like an inspiration, an opening out of every difficulty, and his face brightened exultingly. It presented the means of escape for himself, and, at the same time, revenge upon Lyon. He did not hesitate a moment; drawing out the paper, he tore it into fragments, and scattered them along the gutter as he slowly retraced his steps. At first he determined not to return to the station, but upon consideration thought that his not doing so might create suspicion; so, after allowing a certain time to elapse, he went. The sergeant came to the door and bade him come in, but he shrank back.

'I can't stay,' he muttered, 'I've got my bed to find yet. There's no answer.'

'Hum,' replied the man, doubtfully. 'What did he say?'

'He said nothing.'

'What did he do, then,' said the sergeant, suddenly collaring him and drawing him forward to the light. 'Now, mind what you say, or I'll find you a bed free gratis—for nothing. What did Mr. Lyon say?'

'Nothing, I tell you,' replied the boy, boldly. 'He just tore the paper up and threw it away.'

The man looked at him, and gave him a slight shake.

'I wonder if you could speak the truth if you were paid for it,' he said, reflectively. 'Some of you lads are born with a lie in your mouths. You'll get choked one of these days, young man. Didn't Mr. Lyon speak to you at all?'

'He said I was a young rascal, and told me to go after my friend,' said Winter, who was never at a loss for an answer.

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'You'll do that without being told. Be off with you; Mr. Lyon will square it with you.'

The boy darted off, his ears tingling with a parting blow.

'Catch me going there again!' he said, vengefully. 'If I was a man he wouldn't dare to touch me!'

'As big a young scamp as ever was born, that is!' said the sergeant, thoughtfully. 'I wonder now how much of that tale is true. I'll wait a bit, anyhow, and see if Mr. Lyon comes.'

He waited; but it grew late, and Lyon did not come. At last he went to the cell and opened the door. Gower raised his head eagerly, but dropped it again, seeing him.

'That boy's come back, sir.'

'Well?'

'It ain't well, according to his tale. I believe it's a made-up tale, every bit of it.'

'No; the lad is a faithful little fellow. I have found him true. What does he say?'

'That's just it! he don't say anything; at least, he says Mr. Lyon don't.'

Gower looked up. 'Is there no answer?'

'Perhaps Mr. Lyon's coming,' replied the man, reluctantly. 'He didn't send a message, not if that boy's to be believed.'

Gower gave an impatient gesture. 'Out with it, man! What does the boy say? Did he give the note to Mr. Lyon?'

'Yes, he did, and he just tore it up and told him to go after his friend.'

There was no answer, and he went out, shutting the door quietly. But Gower did not hear; the news came with all the force of an unexpected blow, and as yet he could not realize it. Not for one moment had he doubted the prompt, personal answer to his appeal, and to find that it was not only ignored but scorned, roused all his pride and bitterest anger.

'This is how he carries out his so-called Christianity!' he thought, scornfully. 'This is all his boasted friendship is worth! He is like the rest of the world! test them and they fail. There's no such thing as sincerity; and no such thing as friendship.'

But though he attempted to carry it with a high hand, and pay back scorn for scorn, resenting intensely the supposed insult, he was wounded most deeply. It had cost him a fearful effort to so far conquer his pride as to send that

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message, and he had done so in the expectation of its kindly reception; an expectation founded on his acquaintance with Lyon's character.

'I might have saved myself the trouble; I might have spared my pride! I will not forget this, Mr. Lyon! The time may come when you will regret sending that message,' he murmured.

And yet, with all his anger and indignation, there was a feeling of sorrowful disappointment. Unconsciously Lyon had stood to him as the impersonation of truth and sincerity; he had looked upon him as a man full of noble though, perhaps, mistaken feeling and impulse; he could have staked his existence upon his honour. And now his ideal had fallen, and stood, not on a par with, but far below the ordinary run of humanity. At that moment he felt a genuine contempt for him, and in the light of the present all the past faded away into insignificance. Past benefits, past kindnesses, past proofs of upright integrity, all were lost, forgotten in the one supposed fact of his present desertion. Even the memory of the rescue from the fire ceased to move him as it had hitherto done; he hated the recollection of it, and cast it from him. He slept at last, wearied out; and it was late when he awoke. Silently he prepared to follow his conductor to the court, where his case was to be tried first. How he got there he scarcely knew; there was a mist before his eyes, and an intolerable sense of shame paralysed him.

Very few people were assembled. He glanced round the court, and seeing its empty condition, took courage.

The magistrate looked keenly at him, and turning to an officer asked a question in an undertone. Apparently the man could give no answer, for, with a dissatisfied look he turned from him and spoke to Gower, asking him what he had to say.

At the sound of his voice Gower started; and casting one hasty glance at him, shrank back, the burning blood suffusing his face. He recognized him immediately as one of his acquaintances of former days; a gentleman of high position and influence, at whose table he had frequently sat.

Some vague sense of recognition seemed to trouble the magistrate, for he looked at him long and earnestly, and twice asked his name.

'Have you been here before?' he asked.

'No.'

'Your face seems familiar. I am sorry to see you here now,

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for you are evidently not used to this sort of thing, and it is a first step which all must regret taking.'

He dared not answer, lest his voice should by any chance supply the missing link to memory.

After a moment's pause, the magistrate continued: 'I shall not fine you, as this is your first appearance here; besides, you have already been punished. You are discharged.'

Without a word, stunned by the sudden revulsion of feeling, the rebound from the dull lethargy of despair to the triumphant sense of freedom, he turned to leave, but was called back.

'I am not in the habit of giving advice here,' said the magistrate, bending forward with a pitying look. 'I know it is little valued when given unasked; but I am sorry to see one of your evident social position in such a place as this. Do you not think station, character, reputation, are worth a struggle? You are not lost to a sense of disgrace and shame; let this be a warning to you, and give you determination to start on a fresh course.'

Both words and tone were kind and commiserating, and with the vivid colour still dyeing his face, Gower went out. Drawing his hat down low on his forehead, he looked furtively round to see if he were observed, and hurried off in the direction of his lodging.

Not daring to address him, Winter followed at a short distance, watching him with no little anxiety. He was half afraid of the questioning which probably awaited him, and therefore kept in the background. He saw him enter his lodging, and then turned sharply off, intending to come back in the evening.

He never had much difficulty in getting money, this boy, with his beautiful voice and attractive face. With the latter he won the compassion of many a mother and sister, for say what we will, the handsome sinners get the best of it in this world; and with the former, he charmed money from the pockets of the men who sat drinking in the public-houses night after night, drinking the money that ought to have bought bread for the starving little ones at home, and shoes for the little bare feet. He did not care who gave him money so that he got it. And yet, with characteristic improvidence and generosity, he rarely had much money in his own pocket; liberal to an extreme, he gave away more than he spent, and delighted in giving. His comrades knew this, and often traded

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upon it; it gave him a certain influence and leadership, well sustained by his daring character and cool assurance and self-confidence.

But now he had a motive for saving, and the money that found its way into his pocket remained there. He went back to Gower's room as it began to grow late, and knocked at the door.

Gower's voice bade him come in, and he looked up pleasantly as he entered.

'Holloa, Robin, my friend, tried and trusty, how goes the world with you?'

With a gratified smile at such an unexpected reception, Winter went eagerly forward. 'It goes all right *now*,' he answered, laying emphasis on the now, which Gower understood. 'May I come in a bit, sir, please?'

'Certainly; but you are starved to death, and wet through, lad! Where have you been all day?'

'Everywhere, pretty near,' was the vague reply. 'I was *there* this morning.'

'Why didn't you speak to me? I never saw you.'

'I thought you wouldn't want anyone bothering you, sir.'

'You wouldn't have bothered me; but it was just as well. So you took my note last night, did you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And received thanks and a blessing for your pains, I suppose?'

'He wouldn't bless me, nor thank me. I reckon he ain't no friend of mine.'

'Never mind, Robin; I'll be your friend, and we will keep together till the fickle jade, Fortune, parts us. I have no supper for you, Robin.'

'Mr. Gower,' said the boy, drawing in his breath, 'may I stay here? May I sleep here, I mean? I'll pay my share reg'lar, if you let me. Oh! do let me, sir!'

'But you have a comfortable home, somewhere, lad; why don't you go to it?' asked Gower, surprised at his emotion.

'I can't; she's dead—my grandmother. I haven't got a home at all, now. If you'll let me stay, I'll bring home my money every night! 'pon my word I will, Mr. Gower.'

'Why do you want to come here?'

'Because I want to be with you, sir.'

'Why?' asked Gower, looking curiously at him.

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The boy coloured, and twisted his cap uneasily.

'Well?' said Gower, after a pause.

'Because I like you,' he replied, desperately; 'because you've been kind to me, and beside, you haven't got no friends.'

'And if I had, you wouldn't care for me, I suppose?'

'You wouldn't care for me,' muttered Robin.

'Curious boy! Have you had your supper?'

'No, sir; have you had yours, sir?'

'Yes. Be off, and get some, if you have any money. I haven't a cent.'

The boy looked round the room; he could see no trace of supper, and doubted the truth of Gower's statement, but did not dare say so.

'May I bring my supper here?' he asked, humbly.

'If you like.'

He went out and presently returned with two hot meat pies and a small loaf of bread.

'I didn't buy them,' he said, triumphantly; 'a gentleman saw me looking in at the window, and in he went and bought those two pies, and then he beckoned me in, and gave 'em to me. I bought the bread.'

'Well, all the better for you; you have saved your money.'

'But I can't eat them both! Won't you please have one, sir?'

He spoke hesitatingly, not knowing how it might be taken.

Gower looked at him and laughed. 'Why did you take the trouble to make all that up?' he asked. 'Did you think to take me in? A likely story that a gentleman would give you pies! Don't try that on with me, my boy, if we are to be friends.'

'Well, sir, will you eat the pie?'

Gower sighed. 'Yes, I'll eat it, Robin. I know how you give it. It is not the first time you have rendered me a service.'

They ate in silence, Gower too preoccupied to speak, and Winter afraid of disturbing him; he glanced at him now and then, wondering what he was thinking of, and wishing he would look less careworn and sad; boy-like, he hated anything approaching melancholy.

The clocks were striking twelve, when Gower roused himself and turned toward him. 'Why don't you go to sleep, Robin? It is late for such a child as you,' he said, kindly, noting his heavy eyelids. 'That reminds me, where *are* you to sleep?'

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'Oh, I'll sleep on the floor all right,' he replied, eagerly. 'Don't you trouble yourself about me, sir.'

'On the floor! Yes, but you must have something more than bare boards, or you will be starved to death.'

A little wooden bedstead stood in one corner of the room, and he looked dubiously at it, and the one worn rug that covered it.

'I don't see what we can do, unless you roll yourself up in the rug.'

'But what will you do, sir?' asked Winter, hesitatingly.

'I? Never mind me. Take the rug and curl up.'

He spoke authoritatively, and the boy dared not disobey. Lifting the rug from the bedstead, he reluctantly rolled it round him, and laid himself down in the opposite corner.

'Good night, sir,' he said, with an unwonted sense of comfort and content.

Gower answered him shortly, and still sat with his elbows resting on the table, and his head on his hands. At last he rose, and putting out the light, threw himself on the hard mattress. All was quiet and still, and in a short time his regular breathing told that he was asleep, in spite of the discomfort of his resting-place.

Winter listened, lifting his head cautiously; then he rose, and unrolling the rug, crept softly across the room and laid it gently over the sleeping man; did it so gently that he never felt it, and all unconscious slept on.

He did not go back to his corner, but curled himself up at the foot of the bed, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. In the early gray dawn he awoke, and shivering with the cold, rose and looked round, for the moment wondering where he was. A glance at the bed recalled the past evening, and stepping quietly across the room, he went out. In a short time he returned with a basket of wood and coal, and kneeling down before the fire-place, arranged them with deft, accustomed fingers: then striking a match, he set fire to it, and in a few minutes a bright blaze gave promise of warmth and comfort.

He stood surveying his handiwork with satisfaction for a few moments, and then taking a small kettle which stood on the hob, went out again. He was longer away this time, and when he returned with the kettle full of water, and two or three small parcels and a loaf, Gower was moving uneasily.

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Putting the kettle on the now cheerful fire, he went to the bedside.

'Well,' said Gower, 'what do you want?'

'Nothing; is there anything you want, sir? hot water for shaving? yes, sir; ready d'rectly, sir.'

With ready mimicry he assumed the mechanical alacrity of a city waiter, flicking the dust off the table, and making as much display as possible of the breakfast equipage, which latter consisted of a spoutless teapot, one cup and saucer, and a tin spoon.

Gower watched him with amused eyes.

'What did he say to you, Robin?'

'Who, sir?'

'Why, you little rascal, you know! Whose aid did you invoke to bring about such a metamorphosis?'

'He didn't say nothing pertic'lar, sir; only told me to take care of you!'

An answer given in sheer fun, but having strange effect on Gower. All the amusement departed from his face, and with a gloomy look he rose and came to the fire.

'I believe that's true,' he said, shortly.

'What, sir?' asked the boy, not comprehending.

'That *he* brought us together—sent you to me; it was regular devil's work.'

'Then he's done a good thing for me once in his life at any rate; I'll be bound he's sorry for it now,' said Winter, coolly.

'I'll be bound he's exulting! What have you there?'

'Coffee; that's sugar; I haven't got a basin for it. That's butter.'

'Where did you get the money?'

'It didn't cost much.'

'Where did you get the money?'

'I got it honestly; I sold fusees and things,' said the boy doggedly.

'Don't bring anything here that you don't come by honestly, that's all, lad. How came that rug on me?'

'I put it there when I got up.'

Gower looked at him searchingly, and then in a softer tone said, 'You are a good little fellow, I do believe, Robin, I wish you were in better hands.'

'I don't,' was the candid reply. 'I hate good people.'

'That is human nature, Robin; I am afraid there isn't much

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of the divine in you, my boy. I wonder what process would be effectual in bringing about a reformation in you. Let me see, you hate Mr. Lyon, I think?'

'Yes, I do,' said Winter, firing up.

'What for?'

'Because he interferes with me and—and despises me! he's made *her* hate me too, and I'll never forgive him.'

'And who is *her*, pray?' asked Gower, considerably amused.

'That little girl Mrs. Ripon's took—Sybil. She used to love me and come anywhere with me, and now she tells me to go away—I'm bad and dirty!'

The boy's voice choked, and he turned his face away, ashamed of the emotion he could not control.

'Oh, that's it, is it? Were you dirty?'

'Not more than usual, only she's so grand now.'

'How is she grand?'

'She's got a lot of new things, reg'lar fine things. My! she did look a little beauty! I wish I was a man.'

'What would you do?'

'I'd marry her and take her away.'

'*You* marry *her*,' cried Gower; 'you are a nice one to talk of marrying! How would you keep her, pray?'

'I'd work honest for her; if she was my sister I'd work and get lots of money.'

'Work and get lots without her: money is always useful. Who gave her these new things?'

'Mr. Lyon got some friend of his to make them, I think,' replied Winter, pouring out the coffee. 'It's rather groundy in this old teapot.'

'What are you going to do? this is the only cup. Have the saucer, it's big enough.'

So Winter took the saucer and sat down on the floor with his back to the wall, for there was only one chair in the room. Gower cut the bread and divided the butter, giving the lion's share to the boy.

'How do you know Mr. Lyon has forbidden the child to go with you?' he said, continuing the conversation.

'Because he hates me,' replied Winter, with all the inconsistency of prejudice. 'I *know* he's done it.'

'Very likely,' said Gower, dryly: 'you are not exactly the sort of playmate for a good little girl.'

'I shouldn't have done her any harm,'

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'We can't touch pitch and keep clean hands, my boy.'

'I'm not pitch!' cried the boy passionately. 'Not to her. I never said a bad word, nor swore, nor nothing with her. I wouldn't have her like the other little girls about for all the world, and I'd never teach her anything bad. I know I'm pitch 'longside of such boys as lame Dick, but I'm not pitch with her.'

'Well, how is Mr. Lyon to know that? He must judge by what he sees.'

'And now you go and take his part, when he wouldn't come near you when you sent for him,' was the indignant reply.

'We must do every man justice, even though we do not like him,' said Gower, with a keen pang of self-reproach at this tacit acknowldgement of enmity against the man who had saved his life. 'But never mind him; I want you to go somewhere for me as soon as you have finished your breakfast.'

Going to a cupboard he took out a roll of manuscript, and pen and ink. 'There,' he said, scribbling a few words on a piece of paper, and folding it up, 'I'd rather you took it than I. Mind you don't come away without the money, Robin, or we shall have to turn out of this crib. The rent is due to-day; it is payment in advance here.'

The boy took the manuscript and note and went off without a word. The fact was he was hurt and offended; Gower's words had touched his pride.

'So Mr. Lyon thinks I'm pitch!' he muttered, vindictively. 'I'll show him whether I am or not; I'm bad enough, but I'll be worse yet.'

There was no occasion for him to go near Abbey-court, and yet a strange fascination drew him there. The street-door was shut, and though he opened it and listened, he could hear nothing of Sybil; all was silent. There was no sound of childish voices, or patter of little feet in the room above.

With cool audacity he went upstairs and listened on the landing; still he could hear nothing, and then he opened the door and looked in. The room was empty; and glancing round, noting the toys on the floor, he softly shut the door again and went down.

He took the note and manuscript to the address given him, and waited patiently for an answer. It came at last, in the shape of a sovereign, wrapped up in a piece of note-paper.

'Mr. Gower says I'm to give the answer to the messenger,'

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said the publisher, 'and all I can say is that he is a fool for his pains. Now, you young rascal, I know you——'

'And so does Mr. Gower,' interrupted the boy, snatching the half-withheld parcel. 'Keep your cheek for them as want it, and mind your own business.'

He was half-way down the street before the astonished man quite knew what he had done, and he did not cease running till he was far away. Then he stopped and took breath.

A little way in front of him a girl was looking into a shop window. A paper bag, dropped by a passer-by, lay on the pavement, and he picked it up and blew into it; then, stepping behind the girl, clapped it between his hands, the loud report making her jump and exclaim angrily,—

'You young——! oh, it's you, of course! if I wasn't just thinking of you. What do you mean by frightening a body's senses out of them like that?'

'Didn't know you had any to frighten,' was the saucy reply. 'What were you thinking about me, Nancy?'

The two were good friends, though they rarely met without a quarrel.

'A likely story that I'm going to tell you! Where's your gentleman friend?' replied Nancy, tauntingly.

'Where I left him, and that's where you've never been. I'm going to him now.'

He walked on, but she called after him: 'I say, Mr. Lyon's looking out for you.'

At first he took no notice, but a sudden thought struck him, and he stopped.

'Give my compliments to Mr. Lyon, and tell him a partic'lar friend of his has took me in hand, and is going to turn me out a model boy.'

With that he ran off, leaving Nancy looking after him with a sudden gleam of intelligence in her eye.

'Oh, that's it, my boy,' she said; 'I see your little game now.'

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CHAPTER XV.

THE FIGHT STOPPED.

IT did not take Lyon long to complete his arrangements, and in an incredibly short time Mrs. Willett was installed in as comfortable a room as she could wish, with a convenient kitchen at hand and a little maid to help her with her work. The boys' rooms followed, and Lyon himself worked with a will. The dining-room, as Mrs. Willett called it, though it was a breakfast and supper-room only, except on Sundays, was fitted with cocoa-nut matting, a gay rug, a long table, and plenty of chairs. The three bedrooms had the plainest of furniture, much of it made by Lyon himself; four small bedsteads in each, with coarse clean sheets and warm rugs. All was comfortable and clean and homely, and all it wanted was occupants. These it did not take long to find.

There was a smile on Lyon's face when he met his boys that week, a smile which to Nicholas's knowing eyes betokened something good.

'Now, guv'ner,' he said, in the honest, straightforward way which Lyon liked and encouraged, 'you've got some stunning thing in your head, I can see: let's have it out at once, please, sir; I'm just in that state of excitement that I can't hold out long, and if you keep us on the hooks I shall hook it.'

'I am going to tell you, right away off,' said Lyon. 'Don't be frightened, Nicholas; you shall not explode with curiosity if I can help it.'

There were fewer than usual present that night. Lyon knew the reason why: it was a grand night in the City; there were illuminations and various other attractions, and he could see that those who had come out of deference to him, were on thorns of impatience, longing to get away. Dick and his little chum, Sam Martin, were there, and half-a-dozen others of their age

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and class. Most of the bigger ones were away: Nicholas and five or six more representing the usual number.

Lyon looked round. 'Boys, do you remember little Anthony Blake?' he asked, quietly. They looked sober and subdued, and Nicholas nodded assent.

'He had no home, you know; and one cold winter night he was turned out of the only shelter he could find into the pitiless snow, and it covered him up like a sheet, and the next morning they found him—dead! You remember it, boys?'

'I saw him,' muttered Nicholas. 'And I,' said another, and another.

'I saw him too, and I shall never forget it! Starved to death, when there was room and to spare for thousands such as he in the houses round. Now, my lads, some of you have regular homes, and there is little chance of you being starved to death; but there are others who have no certain shelter, and are homeless and nearly friendless. Dick, what do you call your home?'

'I ain't got a real home since mother died,' said the boy, surprised at the question. 'Me an' Sam sleeps at Mrs. Lent's 'long of her Jimmy, but she's allus telling us to get out.'

'I know, Dick; but I want these others to hear. And you, Teddy, where is your home?'

'Ain't got none, neither, guv'ner,' was the prompt reply. 'Sleeps anywheres.'

There were six little homeless vagabonds in the room, as Lyon knew full well, and he questioned each in turn, while the others, who by this time had an inkling of his object, sat and listened attentively.

'So six of you little fellows have no home, and are liable any night to be forced out into the streets. That's bad, isn't it? Suppose I knew a place where there was room for a few of you boys—beds and so on—and I left it to you to decide who should go, what would you do?'

'Send them little chaps, in course,' said Nicholas. 'Where's the place, guv'ner?'

Then Lyon took them to his home, and showed them over it, and everything met with unqualified approval. He had been half afraid that this step would create a great deal of jealousy; therefore he had introduced it to them as he had done, hoping, by appealing to their sympathy and better feeling, to win their hearty concurrence. It succeeded better than he anticipated

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with those present, and he was pleased to see the interest they all took in the various arrangements. The bath-room especially delighted them; the beds rather overawed them; they looked so uncompromisingly clean and tidy.

'Are we to come to-night?' asked Dick, his pale face beaming.

'Certainly.'

'But we shall black everything so, guv'ner,' he said, apprehensively.

'No, you won't. What do you think the bath-room is for?'

'But our clothes is dirty,' persisted Dick, who could not imagine a state of perfect cleanliness possible.

'I'll see about your clothes,' was the mysterious reply, and the boys looked at each other and chuckled; it was evident that they were about to undergo a strange and complete metamorphosis.

And so they were, for Lyon had no intention of allowing the reign of dirt in his domain. He felt very fatherly that night when he went his round, and saw the six happy clean little faces on the pillows. They were all awake, for the novelty would not allow sleep, and they nodded and laughed as he bent over them and asked them if they were warm and comfortable. Dick's face was a picture; it beamed with contentment and happiness, but there were two big tears in his eyes for all that.

'Why, Dick, my little man, no tears the first night at home, if you please,' said Lyon, patting the thin little cheek.

'It's so beautiful,' gasped Dick; 'it seems as if I must wake up by-'n-by!'

'I hope you will, but not to find it all a dream. It is very real, Dick.'

Dick covered up his face, and Lyon went down to his own room. It was much smaller than the one he had left, but he did not care for that. He sat down before the fire, tired out with a hard day's work, and leaning his head on his hand, fell into a reverie. One of his long-planned schemes was at last accomplished, and what was it after all?

Only six little homeless wanderers out of the city's multitudes sheltered and protected! Only six! True there was room for six more, who would speedily be brought in; but what of that? Was this the utmost he could do? he, with his boundless aspirations and unconquerable will.

He felt weary, discouraged, sad at heart; the continued

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failure of his search for Gower disheartened him, and yet he could not give it up. The wish to find him, to know what he was doing, was stronger instead of weaker, and he was restlessly anxious to go out into the night and search till he found him.

The impulse became almost overpowering; he rose and paced the room, trying to think of other things. It was a cold, dreary night; foggy and dark. Drawing aside the curtains he glanced out, but instantly closed them again and returned to the fire. What was the use of going out such a night as that? it was too dark to recognize anyone.

But he was in a restless, irritable mood, and the stillness of the house was unbearable. He tried to read, to write, but could not concentrate his thoughts; they would persist in wandering off to other scenes of very different character. He pictured Gower reeling from some tavern to his lonely lodgings; he pictured him ill; injured, perhaps, in a street row, lying on a hospital bed alone, uncared for save by a stranger's pitying hand. Then he wondered what Winter was doing, and recalled, not without pain, the look of hatred he had seen on his face. It was incomprehensible; what had he done to deserve it? True, he had been the means of preventing Miss Wycherley's misplaced charity, but that was such a trifle! he could not believe that the boy, bad as he was, would resent it so bitterly.

While he was revolving it in his mind, a sharp knock disturbed him. He heard his own name, and went out on the landing.

'Am I wanted, Mother?' he asked, glad of an interruption.

'It's that new lot down at Watt's buildings, Mr. John; they're fighting away like mad, and poor Mrs. Lane's just frightened out of her senses.'

'They'll never leave off till one on 'em's dead,' sobbed a woman's voice. 'There's Ben Forset, he's vowing he'll do for my Jim, and they're both mad with drink!'

The buildings named were close at hand, and Lyon followed the woman. It was a common thing to him, this being fetched to stop a fight, but one of the parties was unknown to him; as Mrs. Willett had said, he was a new comer, only recently arrived.

Wherever there is a fight there is a crowd. Lyon's quick eye detected several of his boys in the ring round the fighters, but they crept off on seeing him.

'Here's Mr. Lyon! make way there; he'll stop 'em,' cried a woman's voice, and the crowd gave way.

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Lyon pushed his way in. At a glance he saw that Lane was drunk; but the other man, Forset, had had only just enough to make him dangerous. He was a strong thick-set fellow, with a suspiciously cropped head, and a face of the low villainous type common in convict prisons. A black eye and cut cheek by no means added to his personal appearance, and he stood looking at his antagonist with a ferocious expression which justified the woman's fears.

As Lyon stepped into the circle, Lane reeled forward, half-blinded by the streaming blood from a gash on his forehead.

'Oh Jim, Jim!' cried the poor wife. 'Come away home, Jim! For the children's sake, Jim!'

But he was too drunk to hear or heed. Forset stood watching for him with a dangerous look in his eyes, and his fist ominously clenched.

On came the poor blind fool, and just as the heavy arm was raised to descend with crushing force upon him it was seized and held in an iron grasp.

'Let us have fair play, my men, not murder,' said Lyon's cool voice.

'Who says it's murder?' cried Forset, savagely. 'Stand out of the way.'

'Ay, stand back,' said Lane, with drunken inarticulateness.

'I am not going to stand back and see murder committed.'

'Who says it's murder?' again demanded Forset, threateningly.

'I do,' replied Lyon, looking him full in the face. 'You know that you have it in your heart to give Lane such a blow that he will never rise again. You know it, and how dare you ask me who says it is murder? There is murder written on your face.'

He knew his man, and had calculated the effect of his words. Forset drew back, visibly quailing before the stern face and uncompromising words: murder was an ugly word.

'Can't a man have a fair stand-up fight without it's being called murder?' he muttered, sullenly.

'Yes, some men can, but not such as you. Look here, my man, I do not want to say harder things than you deserve, but you know as well as I that you would be glad to see Lane lying dead at your feet. I am only saving you from yourself. I know you.'

While he had been talking it had flashed upon him where

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and how he had seen him before. Some two or three years previously he had visited Portsmouth dockyards, and some of the faces of the convicts had impressed themselves on his memory. He remembered now the bullet head and vindictive face before him.

Two policemen were pushing their way through the crowd, and seeing them Lane stole off, followed by his wife, who, now that the fray was over, had recovered her shrill volubility, and was rating him soundly, in no measured terms.

Lyon put his hand on Forset's shoulder. 'Come home with me, and I'll doctor that cut,' he said in a tone half kindly, half commanding.

'You won't trust yourself with that villain, Mr. Lyon!' cried one of the women. 'It's as much as your life is worth, sir!'

'Is it?' he asked, turning to the man.

Forset scowled angrily at the woman. 'It 'ud be as much as your life is worth,' he growled. 'Clear out there.'

They shrank back terrified, and he went out. One of the policemen seemed inclined to interfere, but let him pass unmolested at a sign from Lyon, who was closely following him.

They got out into the street, and Forset put his hand to his face with an exclamation of rage and pain. 'I'd have paid him out for this in another minute,' he said, with an oath.

'And then I should have been obliged to pay you out,' said Lyon. 'It is better for you as it is.'

'He's pretty near blinded me for life.'

'Nonsense! I'll put that right in a very short time. This way.'

Forset stopped, irresolute. The fact was, the man was a coward, and the sight of his own blood frightened him: the pain, too, was great, and he had no powers of endurance. There was something about Lyon that inspired confidence: he had no fear that he would hurt him, and he was anxious to get his face dressed. It was self-interest that made him pause. His reflections were probably something after this fashion: 'Here is a man who can doctor me up, and do for me what I can't do for myself: my best policy is to let him do it.'

Doubtless he looked upon Lyon as a fool for his pains, but that did not deter him from profiting by his skill. He followed him in silence, holding a dirty rag, yclept by courtesy a handkerchief, to his swollen face.

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Mrs. Willett had gone to bed, so Lyon went into the kitchen. With skilful hands he bathed and bound up the wounded head, applying the usual remedies. Forset did not speak, but groaned and twisted about, though his doctor's fingers were tender as any woman's.

'Now,' said Lyon, when he had finished, 'would you like to knock me down?'

The man stared at him. 'I don't want to break your head 'cause you've mended mine,' he replied, gruffly.

'I'll give you leave to try if you wish to do it.'

Forset looked at the strong, powerful frame before him, and shook his head dubiously. 'I wouldn't care to try, not by fair means,' he avowed candidly, casting suspicious glances at the muscular arms. 'You ain't the sort o' cove to be done like that fool yonder. Thank you, mister, for wot you've done.'

He spoke awkwardly, as if thanks were foreign things, and rose to go.

'Wouldn't you like some supper?' asked Lyon.

'I'm game, mister wot's-yer-name. Wot 'ave you got?' was the prompt reply. 'Mind yer, I'll stand the story, but none o' yer moral.'

'What is the story?'

'Supper, ain't it? I'm not so green as to think you'll give one without t'other, so I lets you know in time.'

'Well, here is the story at any rate,' said Lyon, fetching cold meat and bread and placing them before his guest. 'I shall not trouble you with much of a moral to-night.'

He set to and ate as if he had tasted nothing for days, every now and then casting curious glances at his host, who sat buried in thought.

'It's a rum go!' he said, suddenly.

'What is?' asked Lyon.

'Why, all this,' jerking his thumb toward the table, and then giving it a sweep round. 'I'm blest if I can make it out. Wot's the meaning of it all? it's a reg'lar riddler.'

'Shall I explain it?' asked Lyon.

'If 'tain't troubling you too much, Mister——'

'My name is Lyon.'

'Is it though? I've heard tell of you then. You're the chap that threw Johnson! oh, I've heard of you.'

Johnson was a big burly fellow who boasted that no man living could throw him: he was a bully as well as a boaster,

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and treated his meek little wife brutally. He was indulging in the luxury of beating her one night when Lyon appeared upon the scene, and without a word of expostulation knocked him down. Johnson never forgot it; neither did the spectators, and it was noised abroad, and Lyon's fame was great. The man who could fell Johnson was worthy respect. Forset looked at him with great interest when he heard his name. 'They knew wot they were up to when they guv out your name,' he said, admiringly. 'It's summit like a name and suits, which most names don't. I'm blest if you ain't an out an' out lion. Let's look at yer arm, guv'ner.'

Amused at the cool request, Lyon bared his arm and displayed a magnificent development of muscle.

'Ah now, if I had such a harm as that I'd show 'em a thing or two,' said the man, enviously. 'Anyhow, tell us the riddler, guv'ner, and let's be off. Wot's the meaning of it?'

'I cannot very well explain without going back some years: there's a story connected with it. Do you care to hear?'

'Yes, if 'tain't too long.'

'I'll make it as short as possible. Some years ago, three I think—yes, it is three—I was sent for to see a man who had been dangerously injured in a drunken fight. I had never seen him and knew nothing about him, but his friends knew me it seemed. When I got to the place I saw at once what sort of a customer I had to deal with: his head told a tale; he was just out of prison.'

'Hang it!' grumbled Forset, putting his hand to his smooth cropped head, 'they don't give a fellow any chance, a-shaving and a-shoring of 'em in this here disgraceful way. They think we've got no feelings.'

'He had been serving his five years for burglary,' continued Lyon, 'and had only been out a week, and there he was, dying.'

'I don't see wot this 'as got to do with it,' interposed Forset, fidgeting uneasily.

'Wait a bit, my man,' replied Lyon, composedly. 'This man let me into a few secrets, and enlightened me considerably. He told me about his life in the dockyard yonder, and all its wretchedness and misery there. He had gone there young, and had come out old in feeling and experience, if not in years. I cannot tell you all he said, and you wouldn't care to hear it, perhaps; all that concerns you is this: he asked me, with his dying breath, to give a friendly hand to any such poor chap as

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himself, who had come out of prison to find every man's hand against him. I promised. Now do you understand?'

'I begin to see daylight through it, but 'tain't quite clear. Howsomever, you're a good sort in yer way; speak as you find's my motter. I'll be off now, and good-night to you, guv'ner.'

He rose and went out into the passage, Lyon following with the light.

One of the children upstairs coughed in his sleep, and Forset glanced up.

'One of your kids?' he said, inquiringly.

A curious idea flashed upon Lyon. 'Go upstairs; I have something to show you,' he said.

The man hesitated, but with a glance at the authoritative face beside him, went up. Opening a door, Lyon bade him enter, and followed, shading the light with his hands. It was one of the children's bedrooms, and the little occupants were still and quiet in the dreamless sleep of childhood.

Stopping at the first bed, Lyon motioned the man to look.

'Well,' he whispered, gruffly, 'it's only a kid.'

'Whose?'

'Blest if I know.'

'Do you remember a man named Parker, who lived down Ratcliff-highway, in Ship-alley, I think? He killed his wife in a drunken rage, and was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. It created a great deal of talk at the time.'

'I remember, guv'ner—should think I did! he was a pal of mine.'

'This is his child.'

Forset gave a smothered exclamation, and bent down to look more closely at the boy. 'Parker's boy,' he muttered. 'He's dead, you know, guv'ner.'

'Yes, I know. Did you know a widow woman named Scott, who lived in Bit-alley? Oh no, you wouldn't; she didn't live there long. She went to prison for theft; I think she was convicted twelve times, and at last she got three years. This is her son.'

Forset glanced at the bed, but without the interest displayed in the other.

'This,' continued Lyon, 'is an orphan—father and mother both dead; one died in prison, the other in the workhouse. Poor little fellow, he is lame.'

'Wot's his name?'

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'Dick Donovan.'

'Haven't the pleasure of his acquaintance.'

At the fourth bed Lyon paused a minute without speaking. Its occupant, a little fellow about ten years old, was fast asleep, his face turned up towards the light.

'Who's he?' whispered Forset, evidently anxious to be off, yet considering something due to the man who had doctored and fed him, so repressing his impatience.

'This is Sam Martin.'

Forset gave a sudden start and drew back, glancing at Lyon with lowering, suspicious eyes.

Taking no notice, Lyon went on.

'His father and mother lived over Shadwell way, and before the poor little chap was born the father was taken up for burglary with violence and convicted. He got ten years. The wife stopped in Shadwell for four or five years, and then took to tramping the country with the child. But she got tired of that and came back to town to pick up a living as best she could. When I first knew her she was selling penny toys in the streets, and Sam sold blacking. Then she went into the flower trade, and used to sit on the pavements with her basket before her. That did not last long, and she began to hawk hearthstones. I can't tell you how many things she did, but at last she took to drink.'

'Where is she now?' whispered the ex-convict, eagerly. 'Tell us where she is, guv'ner! Poor old gal, she's had a hard time of it with yon young 'un too. She's my wife, guv'ner, and that kid's mine. I've been askin' everywhere for 'em over at Shadwell, but nobody knew nothing about 'em. Tell me where she is and I'll clear out. Is she in these parts?'

'No.'

'To think I should hit on the wery cove as could tell me all about 'em! If it ain't the rummest go! I'll clear out now, guv'ner, and thank ye for what you've done.'

'Stop one minute, Martin. Do you think I should have the little lad here if his mother could take care of him?'

'Why can't she take care on him?' and then a suspicion crossing his mind, he cried hastily: 'She ain't been up to any of her larks and got nabbed, has she?'

'No; I told you she took to drink.'

'Well?'

'And you know what drink does in the long run, Martin?'

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He stared at him stupidly. 'Wot's it all about?' he said, bewildered. 'Why can't you tell a cove wot he asks, and let him go? If she 'as took to drink she must live somewheres, I s'pose.'

'Not if she has drunk herself into her grave,' was the quiet reply.

He looked around him vaguely, and staggered back a step. 'Dead?' he whispered, hoarsely. 'Poor old gal! Dead!'

And he sat down on the locker by the bed and gazed stupidly before him.

'Come downstairs and I will tell you about it,' said Lyon.

'Wait a minute. Is this her boy, d'ye say?'

With a strange look on his face he bent down and looked at the child. 'My boy,' he muttered, 'my boy!'

The child stirred in his sleep and smiled, throwing out a little thin arm, and murmuring inarticulate words.

Martin listened eagerly, but looked up disappointed. 'Wot's he a-sayin'? some'ut about his supper.'

'Very likely: he has had a good one to-night, the first for many a long month. Come: we shall awake them.'

They went down to the kitchen again, and Martin sank into a chair shivering and looking half-dazed. 'How is it you've got the kid?' he asked, suddenly.

'I have had my eye on him since his mother died; but he only came to-night. I tell you what you had better do, my man; go and get a good night's rest; you will be ill if you don't. If you come here to-morrow night about nine I will tell you all about it; you are not fit to hear now.'

He saw that the man was scarcely conscious what he did or said. Taking him by the arm he walked him off to a lodging-house near and saw him safely in. Then he went back to his own room, but not to rest. This had been but an interlude, a brief respite from his burden of anxious thought; now it was over, and the burden was heavier than before. What would be the result of this discovery?

He had had a presentiment of the truth, from the moment he had recognized the man as an ex-convict, and this, coming upon him with sudden force, had impelled him to the strange course he had pursued. He had reasoned thus:

'If it be the man he will soon find out the truth, and then what will he do? probably take the boy away. If I can disarm him at once, and win his concurrence, the boy is safe.'

He had done his best, and the result was in other hands.

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CHAPTER XVI.

MR. CHESTER.

THERE was a merry scene the next morning at the breakfast table. In the first place each of the little lads had a clean, whole suit of clothes; not new, certainly, in the usual sense of the term, for some were patched and mended, but new to them. Then there was a blazing fire, inspiring cheerfulness with its warmth and ruddy light. Lastly there was the breakfast itself, and a substantial meal at any time of the day, but especially in the morning, was a rarity to these hungry little fellows, and one they knew how to appreciate.

Lyon came in to take his place at the head of the table. He had intended merely to give them a look, and leave the presiding to Mother Willett, but had changed his mind. What he was most anxious to encourage was a home-feeling, and he felt this could best be done by drawing out the children's affections towards himself. It is not the place that constitutes home, it is the people in the place, and if they loved and trusted him and felt that he loved and trusted them, he knew that the home-feeling would prove itself a plant of rapid growth.

One thing he was especially pleased to see, and that was the merriment in the children's eyes. As a rule the children of the very poor, and the gutter children of our streets, do not know what it is to be merry, to abandon themselves to real fun and glee. They scarcely ever laugh; the peal of childish laughter so dear to many a parent's heart is never heard among them. Life means hard work and small pay, a long unsatisfactory struggle for existence, a fight against hunger and cold and neglect, or worse. The younger ones play sometimes, indeed the very little ones, those too young to do anything for their own living, spend most of their time in the gutters playing. But what sort of play is it? that is the question. Not the happy, merry play of other children, though it is often noisy enough,

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boisterously noisy. They will shout and scream, and doubtless enjoy themselves in their own fashion; but there is no mirth in their voices, and the words that issue from even baby lips would startle and shock the unaccustomed ear.

Lyon was a firm believer in good downright honest fun: he liked to see his boys convulsed with laughter, and hear their voices brimming over with mirth. He had taught them games, and many a time as blind man had chased them screaming with laughter round the room.

'I have very little faith in a boy who can't laugh,' he used to say, and experience had justified him. It is natural to boys to laugh, and if they don't do it there is something radically wrong somewhere.

He was satisfied with the success of his scheme so far. The boys, though thin and pale, looked happy and satisfied, and were under no restraint whatever; they knew him too well. After breakfast he gathered them round the fire, and in a few simple kindly words told them what he wished them to do. This, for the future, was to be their home, till he could provide something better for them. They were to keep themselves as respectable and clean as they could, and after buying dinner save their money to bring home.

He then showed them a long box, fixed against the wall in one of the recesses. It was narrow and shallow, and in the lid were twelve slits. Opening it he showed them that it was divided into twelve compartments, and then he proceeded to write their names on the lid, one over each slit.

'This is the money-box: each of you must save all you can to buy yourselves decent clothes. I shall start you this morning with a stock of blacking, matches, fusees, and other things, and shall expect you to bring home all you get except what you spend for your dinner.'

The boys listened, with keen looks on their prematurely wise little faces: each was mentally wondering how much stock he would give them and how much they would be able to put in the box, besides calculating how much they would be allowed to spend for dinner. Lyon went on to explain it fully to them. They were to pay a penny each night for their lodging and board, they were to spend what they liked for their dinner, but they must save enough to buy the next day's stock. It sounded fair enough to the little fellows, and they were eager to begin.

'Now, go out in the passage and put on your boots,' said

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Lyon, smiling at their impatience. They rushed out to find in the passage a row of six pairs of little boots, and loud were their exclamations of delight.

'One thing, remember,' said Lyon, 'those boots are never to come into this room. I'm not going to bother you with many rules, but I want my boys to be tidy and clean when I come in to see them in the evenings. There's the bath-room, with plenty of water and towels, and if you can't come to supper with clean hands and faces it's a pity, isn't it? You have each a pair of slippers, see, and mind you put them on.'

He stood watching them off, and then started for his own day's work. At the corner of a narrow street he hesitated for a moment and then turned up, stopping at a greengrocer's shop. The master was standing inside the doorway, and touched his cap respectfully.

'Well, Mr. Sandown, have you made up your mind yet?' asked Lyon, pleasantly.

'*That* I 'ave sir, this very moment, and not a moment sooner,' said the man emphatically, bringing his hand down heavily on a pile of measures. 'Here those things have been waiting to go out this 'alf hour, and that boy is no one knows where, the young good-for-nothing!'

'Now ain't you ashamed of yourself, Miles Sandown, abusing your own flesh and blood like that!' cried a woman's shrill voice from the interior. 'You ought to be thankful every day of your life that you've got such a clever boy as 'll take to his books as nateral as a duck to water; *he* won't be such a ignoramus as his father.'

'Just a listen to her,' said the man, jerking his thumb backward, and winking knowingly at Lyon. 'All *her* geese are swans, ain't they?'

'Well, he is a smart lad,' said Lyon. 'You had better take my advice and let him go regularly to school: I'll find a boy to take his place in the shop.'

'I tell you, sir, I've made up my mind. Directly I see you I says to myself, I'll stand it no longer! let him go to school and ha' done with it. I'm tired of looking after him. Send me a sharp lad as 'll run my errands and do my odd jobs and I'll let t'other go where he likes.'

A well-grown, intelligent-looking boy came running up the street full speed, but stopped short on seeing his father and Lyon, and seemed inclined to run away again. His father

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scowled at him with pretended anger and caught hold of his ear. 'Look here, you young rascal,' he cried, 'if I catch you here again during school hours I'll——' He did not finish the threat, and the boy wriggled away and disappeared inside the shop.

'Then it is settled?' said Lyon.

'Yes; you send me a boy and I'll give him two shillings a week and his victuals: will that do? I shan't give no more if it won't.'

'Oh, it will do for a beginning. I'll bring a sharp little chap to-morrow morning, who will suit you better than master Tom there,' said Lyon.

He shook his head at the boy, who was peeping at him with a radiant face, and walked off. For some time past he had been urging this man to let his son, who was really a clever boy, go to school, but hitherto without success. Both mother and father were proud of the boy's cleverness, but Sandown could not see why his son should want more education than he had had. He was a kind man in the main, and this was his only son, so Lyon had not despaired. His point was gained at last, and he walked away, revolving in his mind which of his boys he should send. It was no part of his scheme to keep the children dependent upon their street trade for existence. He was always on the look out for situations of various sorts, and during the past few years had found many of his boys comfortable homes. For the little fellows he had now under his own roof he was anxious to obtain daily employment, and, if possible, to draft them off, making room for others. It was not his intention to give them a permanent home.

In the course of the day he went down to the city and called at the office of a well-known publisher and proprietor of numerous papers and periodicals of all classes. The head of the firm, Mr. Chester, was alone, and welcomed him cordially.

'You are the very man I want to see,' he said, pointing to a chair. 'I was going to drop you a line, but someone told me you'd changed your address: said you had taken a house. Is it so?'

'Yes: for many reasons I have long wanted to do so, and circumstances have favoured me, just now.'

'It looks very suspicious. When is the day?'

'There is a more important matter to be settled first,' replied Lyon, lightly.

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'And that is——?'

'Who is the lady.'

Mr. Chester laughed. 'Oh, well, if you have not decided that yet, there's no hurry about the other. What have you gone into housekeeping for?'

'To enable me to attend to the interests of my family.'

'And pray who and what are your family?'

'Six in number at present: twelve to-night.'

'I don't understand,' said Mr. Chester, and Lyon explained.

'Umph! do you think you are going to empty our gutters?' he said, after listening attentively.

'Certainly not: I wish there were a chance. That is not one man's work, nor fifty; it is the work of the nation.'

'Which the nation is slow to recognize and own. Don't let your philanthropy carry you too far, Lyon.'

'Can it do so?'

'Well, it may empty your pockets.'

'I object to full pockets,' replied Lyon.

'So I should imagine. Does it never occur to you that there comes to most men a time when they have to depend upon the earnings of the past? We are not always young.'

Lyon's face grew shaded. 'I am not quite unmindful of the future,' he replied, soberly. 'I believe it is every man's first duty to provide a competence for old age. No one has any right to charge others with his maintenance if he can possibly avoid it.'

'I am glad to hear you say so,' said Mr. Chester, approvingly. 'Well, what has brought you here to-day? some business of course. You have brought me something I hope.'

Lyon drew a roll of manuscript from his pocket, and as he did so a small pink book fell out.

'What is that?' said Mr. Chester, as it alighted at his feet.

'That?' said Lyon, with a look of disgust, 'I confiscated it the other night from one of my boys. Tell me what you think of it as a literary production.'

Mr. Chester picked it up and held it at arm's length. It had an illustration on the cover: a man with a child in his arms rushing downstairs pursued by flames. The title was calculated to attract attention,—'*The Betrayed; or, the Child of Mystery.*'

'Umph! no doubt a telling title,' he said, grimly. 'Leading chapters too! "A Lone Man; The Knife: Night Again; Despair; Defiance; The Chase; Haunted; The Murder; The

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Plot; Horror; The Surprise; The Escape." A nice dish of horrors!'

'And it is as weak as it is bad,' said Lyon. 'I never read such awful rubbish! Look here.' And taking the book he turned over the pages and began to read aloud:

'"Your errand," cried Learmont.

'"Money!" bellowed Britton, in a still louder tone.

'"Money again, so soon?"

'"Aye; so soon. I have found a mine, and I don't see why I should not work it, as that infernal Jacob Gray says."

'"Oh! Jacob Gray says that, does he?" sneered Learmont.

'"On my faith he does. He's a shrewd knave, but I hate him. I hate him I say."

'"How much money do you want?" said Learmont, suddenly.

'"Twenty pieces."

'"Twenty? pshaw, make it forty, or fifty, provided you have likewise your revenge on Jacob Gray."

'I will not read the plot for the murder of this said Jacob Gray. What do you think of the style?'

An expressive gesture was all the reply Mr. Chester made.

'And yet there is so much good literature,' he said, after a pause.

'Not at this price, nor got up in such an attractive manner: the illustrations draw. That is the secret of the success of such papers as the *Police News*; it is strange how fond men are of pictures.'

'Especially sensational ones, I suppose.'

'Yes; I have seen half a dozen young fellows, and old ones too, for the old are as bad as the young, in a state of excitement because they could not find the key to one of the illustrations. There was the picture, but not one word about it, though they looked high and low.'

'Do the men care for such trash as that?' asked Mr. Chester, pointing to the book.

Lyon shook his head. 'Not so much, nor do they care for exciting stories generally, they grow beyond them. But the boys devour anything adventurous and sensational.'

'Boys will read.'

'They will, and if they can't get suitable books they get unsuitable. It is astonishing to me that so little notice is taken of this great want.'

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'But notice is taken,' said Mr. Chester, feeling himself, as editor and publisher, bound to stand up for his country's literature. 'Look at all the good, wholesome literature that I alone send out from my printing houses.'

'You have done more than any man living to encourage education, and spread good literature, I know,' replied Lyon, candidly; 'but you do not touch this lower stratum.'

'Well, who is to touch it?' said Mr. Chester, tartly. 'A man can't give them brains and understanding.'

'They have brains and they have understanding; what they want is food—cheap and good.'

'Penny numbers of the Waverley, for instance, and Dickens for twopence,' was the sarcastic reply. 'What else would you like? Kingsley's books in paper wrappers, perhaps!'

'Why not?' said Lyon, coolly.

'For a very simple reason, my dear sir! Who is to pay the authors? When a man gets the hundreds and thousands for his books he is not very likely to be willing to take his fifties only. Write to any of our leading authors, and ask them to write books for boys at a penny a-piece.'

'Well, it is a subject that ought to be dealt with. Do you think we as a nation are doing our duty while we allow such literary refuse as that to defile our land without doing our utmost to check its progress? I think men who can write ought to write, and those who can't ought to give a helping hand to those who can. There might be a public company formed to supply books for the mass, raising money by subscription. That would meet the author's difficulty.'

'Why don't you write some stories yourself? you are just the man for the work. And if money is such a minor consideration you will be suited exactly,' said Mr. Chester, with a sly look at his companion.

Lyon laughed. 'I wish I could. I've done it for the younger ones sometimes.'

'There, I felt persuaded you had tried your hand at it. But there are lots of capital boys' books published now-a-days. Look at F——'s books: they are first-rate.'

'And five shillings each,' said Lyon, dryly.

'Well, I do not see how it is to be avoided; it would not be fair to authors to publish at a nominal price.'

'Nor to the publishers!'

'Nor to the publishers,' said Mr. Chester, stoutly. 'Most

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publishers would feel insulted if you proposed anything so *infra dig.* as penny literature; or if they didn't their pockets would, and a man's pocket bears the same relationship to his philanthropy that his wife does to his general character: it is the better half. Still rights are rights, all the world over.'

'Personal rights first, and then the rights of the nation! False policy, sir.'

'You would make a good statesman, Lyon. That is the war-cry of the true politician: the nation first, the individual second. But in this matter, who can interfere? who is to dictate terms to author or publisher? Bless the man! What would you do with our vaunted liberty?'

'Would a cheap edition materially affect the sale of a better one?' asked Lyon.

'Of course it would. Suppose a boy of the middle class gets hold of a cheap copy, and reads it, when he is asked what book he will have for a birthday present catch him naming that merely for the sake of superior binding and paper. He'll ask for something he hasn't read: nine boys out of ten will.'

'Yes, I suppose that is true. Of course we cannot compel an author to write for boys. We must fall back upon free libraries.'

'Free libraries, yes; there I'm with you, Lyon. I wish we had more of them,' said Mr. Chester, emphatically.

'There ought to be free libraries and reading rooms in every London parish; there are plenty of buildings about that would serve for the purpose. All we want is the working spirit: active influential men to take up the work and push it through. I believe my library has done more to raise my boys than any other influence.'

'Your library! have you one?' asked Mr. Chester in surprise.

'I have had one for years, for my boys and for men. Why I know at least a score of boys who of their own free will have promised me not to read any such rubbish as that you have just seen: they are completely satisfied with what I provide.'

'Have you a reading-room too?'

'No: that is to come. I have my eye on a room, and hope to get it soon. The one I have now is in use for meetings and classes every night.'

'Have you any particular wish to be alone in this work?' demanded Mr. Chester.

'Certainly not. Why?'

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'Because I should like to have a hand in it too. I don't see why you should monopolize it. I suppose the difficulty with this reading-room is really want of funds.'

'Money is all powerful,' said Lyon, smiling.

'What class do you purpose getting?'

'There are plenty of associations and reading-rooms for the better classes; the mechanics and so on. I want the costermongers and cabmen.'

'Well, if any man can get them, you can,' replied Mr. Chester, drawing out his cheque book. 'But it will entail considerable expense: how are you going to meet it? There will be rent of the room, coals and gas, periodicals and daily papers, besides paying a librarian, for there must be some one always in attendance.'

'I know: I have calculated all that, and the question of expense has alone kept me from action all this time.'

'Put me down as an annual subscriber of thirty pounds. Here is a cheque for fifty to start it, to furnish the room, and set the wheels going. I wish you every success, Lyon, and believe you will have it.'

This was not the first time by a great many that the wealthy publisher had helped Lyon in his work among the poor. He had abundance, but out of that abundance he gave abundantly, and was all the better for it.

'I will do what I can to help you,' he continued; 'and if I cannot bring down the price of books to suit the pockets of your friends I can and will levy a tax on every suitable work I bring out, and send some copies to the free libraries. Take that catalogue home with you and mark a couple of hundred books. I will send them round as soon as the room is ready for them.'

Some deep emotion prevented Lyon from speaking: leaning his head on his hands he sat for a few moments in silence. Mr. Chester turned over the leaves of the catalogue, marking a book here and there.

'Only last night I was almost in despair,' said Lyon, suddenly. 'This reading-room has been on my heart for many a long day, and I have been hoping against hope. Last night I looked the whole thing in the face and was tempted to throw it up; it seemed too much for one man, and he in my position. I take this as a personal kindness as much as an act of philanthropy, Mr. Chester, and I do not know how to thank you.'

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'Nonsense, man,' exclaimed Mr. Chester hastily. 'I am the debtor. I wish all my money would bring in as good percentage as that. I'll tell you what it is, Lyon, I don't want to find fault with you, though I am old enough to be your father and might take the privilege of age, but you are too independent, or too proud. Why didn't you speak of this to me before? You ought to have known that I would help you, or rather the work, for it isn't you I'm helping.'

'I knew that you had so many calls upon your purse.'

'And in your pride determined not to give me the chance of helping in a good cause! I don't know that I ought not to accuse you of selfishness! Why should you keep it to yourself, I should like to know?'

'I am only too glad to share it: indeed, I could not do it by myself.'

'Then don't be a dog-in-the-manger. I'll come round and have a look at the room, and we will set the machinery at work. You look out for a librarian.'

'He is found,' said Lyon, with a smile.

'And the room is found, and the money! Why, bless me, I'll arrange to be present at the inaugural address next week.'

'Will you give it?'

'No, no! that is rather too much!'

'But I don't wish to be selfish,' replied Lyon. 'I cannot give it myself, so I ask you: I do not wish to be a dog-in-the-manger.'

'Serves me right,' said Mr. Chester, laughing. 'I'll come and hear you give it, and I'll promise to say a few words myself; will that do?'

Lyon laughingly assented, and rose to go. Mr. Chester took up the manuscript. 'These are my magazine articles, I suppose. I wish you would write more. Did I tell you what was said to me the other day? A Member of Parliament, a clever fellow, asked me who wrote that last article of yours, the one on pauperism. He said, "Whoever he is he has a shrewd brain of his own, and it would be worth his while to write a book on the subject: he handles it in a masterly manner!" What do you think of that?'

'A short article and a book are two different things.'

'As if I did not know that! Come, I'll promise to publish if you will write.'

Lyon shook his head. 'It is beyond me at present.'

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Mr. Chester gave a dissatisfied grunt. 'I am glad you put in that *at present*. I don't quite give you up.'

They parted cordially, like old friends, having a mutual regard and respect. Some six years previously Mr. Chester had received a couple of articles, on a subject then occupying public attention: they were short, concise, and well worded, and attracted his notice. He wrote to the author, asking an interview, and when they met, requested Lyon, for it was he, to write similar articles on various given subjects. Since then he had taken a great interest in him, greater than Lyon had any idea of. He almost forced him to write, and brought his name, or rather his articles, prominently forward in his own magazines. It was only lately, however, that he had heard of his work among the lower grades of London society, and since then had liked him better and respected him more, and many a bank note had found its way from the pockets of the wealthy publisher to the homes of want and misery. The fact was, he honestly admired Lyon's character and method of work: it was unostentatious, and therefore appealed all the more powerfully when recognized. He took a pleasure in helping him, and at the same time grew more and more interested in both the man and his work. John Lyon had a powerful and valuable auxiliary in Mr. Chester.

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CHAPTER XVII.

ALISON MAKES INQUIRIES.

A LARGE parcel of clothing came from Miss Wycherley for the two children, and with it a note for Mrs. Ripon, asking her to come to the house and bring Katie and Sybil with her. The little woman was full of excitement and wonderment.

'What can she want me for?' she repeated over and over again, as she got out her best things and tried to brighten them up a bit.

With thoughtful consideration Alison had enclosed some money, and in her note told her to ride up, and not attempt the long walk. Mrs. Ripon shook her head dubiously at the extravagance of a ride, but it was much too far for the children to walk, and, indeed, for herself in her present state of health.

Rose went down to the corner with them, and saw them safely into an omnibus. It was the first time she had been out of the court since they had gone there to live, and the noise and bustle of the streets had a depressing influence upon her. Hurrying back, she met Nancy, who was evidently on the look-out at the entrance of the court.

'I've been down to your place, and they told me you'd all flitted, and gone to live in the country,' she said, flippantly; 'you'd set up your country house, and wasn't coming back no more.'

'Mrs. Ripon and the children's gone to Islington,' said Rose, pressing her hand to her side, and turning white with a sudden pain. 'Come in and sit a bit, Nancy.'

They went up the stairs, and she sank down in the first chair. 'Never mind me,' she said, as Nancy looked at her, alarmed. 'I'm used to it; it'll go off. I'll talk soon.'

Leaving her to recover, Nancy roamed round the room, and

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then into the inner one, where she discovered the children's new things and brought them out for examination.

'Real French merino! I say, it took some money and some time to make all these!' she exclaimed, holding up the dainty little garments. 'They ain't fit for Katie, them things; they're fit for gentlefolk's children. It 'ud have been more sensible if that Miss what's-her-name had given Mrs. Ripon the money they cost. Look at that sky-blue merino! it's good enough for one of the royal children! no it ain't; it's faded under the folds, look. It's only an old gown cut up. I wish she'd given it to me without cutting of it up. It's fine to be Mrs. Ripon and have Mr. Lyon to look after one. He might put in a good word for me, and get me a dress now and then.'

'I think he's given you some very good words, Nancy.'

'Oh, ah! but I don't want 'em, you see; I want him to give 'em to other folks for me. I might just as well have had that dress,' and Nancy cast envious eyes at the coveted merino. 'He's not a bad sort, ain't Mr. Lyon,' she continued, grumblingly, 'but I can't bide a man so awful strict. He wants me to take you out in the park, in a perambulator.'

'Nancy!'

'Well, he wouldn't let you go to the theatre. I say, has he found that friend of his he was asking about after the fire? Gower, wasn't his name?'

'No, he has heard nothing more about him,' said Rose, wearily.

'Well, I guess I know someone who could tell him something about him. It's my belief that young Winter's up to no good, and knows more than he'll tell. What's he hanging round here for?'

'He's took a fancy to Sybil, and the child is fond o him, in a way.'

Nancy sniffed contemptuously. 'Umph! I'd take good care she hadn't no chance to get fond of him if she was my child; he's an artful young villain, that's what he is.'

'What makes you think he knows anything about Mr. Gower?' asked Rose, after a pause, during which Nancy was trying on the children's new hats, and twisting her neck to get a view of the back of her head.

'Something he said to me. He said he was living 'long with a real gentleman, that's one thing; and he said I was to give a message to Mr. Lyon about a particular friend of his. Now,

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I know that any message from him to Mr. Lyon 'ud have spite at the bottom of it, for he hates him like poison, the little toad. He knows Mr. Lyon was looking everywhere, after the fire, for that Gower man, and it's my belief he knows where he is. What time is Mrs. Ripon coming back?'

'I don't know.'

'She'll have her dinner there, you may be bound. I wonder what she'll bring home. I should like to be in her shoes. I'll come in this evening, and see what she's got. You'd better lie down; you look as white as a dish. I told you you'd kill yourself, and you're doing it.'

With this, Nancy went off, and Rose set about her work with feverish haste.

Arrived at her destination, Mrs. Ripon was taken into a warm, cheerful little room by a bright-looking housemaid, who soon won her heart by her kindness to the children.

'Miss Wycherley is out,' she said, drawing them to the fire, and rubbing the cold little hands. 'She said I was to make you happy and comfortable till she came back.'

'Are we to have dinner here?' asked Katie; whereupon her mother was shocked, and administered a short scolding.

'But the cloth is laid,' persisted the child. 'What is the cloth laid for?'

'Perhaps it's for my dinner,' answered the girl, amused.

'But there are three forks and three spoons,' said practical Katie, standing on tiptoe to see; 'they are not all three for you.'

'If you are good you shall have one; will that do?'

'If you give me some dinner too,' was the cautious reply. 'What will you give me?'

But here Mrs. Ripon interposed, and gave her little daughter a lecture on manners which probably went in at one ear and out at the other.

In a short time Miss Wycherley returned, and came in to see them. Sybil ran to meet her with a cry of delight, having a very vivid recollection of her last visit and its results. Pleased and gratified by the child's demonstrative welcome, she took her in her arms and sat down by the fire, where she vainly tried to coax Katie from behind her mother's chair.

Mrs. Ripon soon felt at her ease with this girl, who was by no means the stately over-awing lady she had expected, and who played with the children almost as if she were a child

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herself; certainly as if she thoroughly understood the child nature.

Having succeeded in making friends with all three, Alison left them to enjoy their dinner alone. The friendly housemaid waited upon them, bringing them all they could possibly want, but did not stay in the room. It was an event in the life of the poor, struggling, hardworking woman; to sit down to a well-spread table was a new experience, and one she did not fail to appreciate and enjoy. It added greatly to her pleasure, too, to sit at the head of the table, and act just as if she were at home, with perfect liberty and freedom. Alison Wycherley knew very little about the lower classes, but with innate delicacy she deprecated the too prevalent custom of making a show of them, and would no more have thought of intruding during Mrs. Ripon's dinner hour than during her next door neighbour's. She did not believe, either, in inviting poor people to dinner, and giving them what she herself would not care to eat. She was inexperienced, and held some curious notions, which in time she found occasion to modify. However, in this case it did no harm for the little ones to revel in soup, and chicken, and dainty custards, and puddings; it was a short trip into fairyland, though, unfortunately, with a return ticket. And the mother enjoyed it all no less than they, though in a more sedate way. Womanlike, she speculated as to the number of eggs used in the manufacture of the puddings, and the time they took to boil or bake, and other culinary mysteries, and took an essentially feminine delight in the beautiful china and glass.

But at last they had finished and the table was cleared, and while they were sitting round the fire, Alison came in with a basket of toys. This gave the finishing touch to the children's delight; and to their unbounded satisfaction the basket was placed on the rug for their personal and immediate investigation. Interest begets confidence. Seeing that Alison really cared to hear the history of her life, Mrs. Ripon found no difficulty in talking. Most people like to talk about themselves: it is an almost universal weakness, and she was no exception to the rule.

Alison listened to a tale of privation and hardship such as she had never *heard* before, though she had read of similar ones, or worse. It opened up a strange new world, and she watched the brave little woman with sympathetic eyes, while she told of battles with poverty, and bitter struggles for daily bread.

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'Ah, miss, one half the world little knows what the other half's a-doing of,' she said, quaintly; 'we poor folks know nothing about your life, while you gentlefolks know nothing about ours. It's weary work sometimes, God knows, but it's just because He knows that we can keep on.'

'What is your work now?' asked Alison.

'Well, miss, I'm at the feather work. I've been at feather work a long time.'

'Feathers?' repeated Alison, at a loss.

'Birds, and such things—fancy made-up feathers, miss. Sometimes they send me a bird of paradise to cut up and use. You see, we make half-a-dozen artificial birds, perhaps, out of one real one. I have all sorts of birds sent me—jays and foreign ones, lots of 'em. But I'm not at birds now, I'm at little fancy feathers. We make them of ordinary little feathers, such as you put in beds, very much, only white or a straw colour; they all come from France, and we make them up.'

'I don't understand,' said Alison, perplexed. 'How can you make anything of the little bed feathers?'

'It isn't easy to explain, miss; if I had 'em here I'd soon show you. We curl the feathers with a knife, and then stick them in rows on one of the long plume feathers. It's pretty work, and easy when you're used to it.'

'I should like to see it. But do they pay you well? You won't mind my asking, I hope,' and Alison coloured, half fearing she had hurt her visitor's feelings.

'Lor, no, miss,' said Mrs. Ripon, briskly, 'I don't mind. They give two-and-six the three dozen. It's pretty good pay, considering.'

She did not say considering what, and Alison did not ask.

'But how long does it take to make a dozen?' she said, after a pause.

'Well, I calculate I can make three dozen a day, if I'm hard pushed; that's to say if I begin at nine in the morning and work pretty constant till one the next morning.'

'Till one the next morning! It is enough to kill you.'

'It'll take more than that to kill me. I've done it often when I've been hindered in the day. The children make a deal of work, and then there's father to see to.'

'It must be hard work!' exclaimed Alison, involuntarily, startled by the revelation of ceaseless toil.

'Ah, that it is, miss, sometimes. If it had not been for Mr.

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Lyon I should have had to give in long ago. He have been a true friend to me, and so he have to many.'

'He seems to be a very charitable man,' said Alison, scarcely knowing how to speak of him, yet wishing to continue the conversation.

'Yes, he is that! and yet, somehow, it don't seem the right sort of word, miss; he don't give as if it were charity; it's more as if he was giving to his own—as if we belonged to him.'

'Is he rich?'

'No; he can't be; though he must get a good bit of money to do all he does. He don't get much at his business, I expect.'

'What is his business?' asked Alison, with interest.

'He's head or foreman in some printing works in the Strand, miss; but he has some other way of getting money, I fancy, though I don't rightly know what; he's as good as told me that much. But if he had ever so much he'd never be rich; he's too free with it.'

'That is a very uncommon failing. I suppose he is something like a city missionary.'

Mrs. Ripon shook her head. 'He is, and he isn't; he looks after the folks and helps 'em, but he's different from any city missionary I ever knew, and I've known a many. You see, miss, it wants more than religion to get on with some of the folks round us; a man must be able to hold his own with 'em. It won't always do for a man to say, It's wrong to do this or that, and think to stop 'em by it; that won't touch a man or woman in a rage. Mr. Lyon, he just goes up to 'em, and if they're fighting he'll stop 'em directly. He's so strong; there ain't a man among 'em who could master him, and they know it.'

'Of course it gives him a certain influence with them.'

'It is a very certain one, miss. But though he's so strong he's as gentle as a woman with anyone that needs it. He waited on Mr. Gower better than I could.'

'Mr. Gower? that was the man who was nearly burnt to death. Is *he* a friend of Mr. Lyon's?'

Mrs. Ripon marked the tone of surprise. 'Did you know him, miss?' she asked.

'I? No. But I read in the papers that he was intoxicated at the time, and I did not think Mr. Lyon the man to associate with that class.'

'Why, that's just the class he does associate with!' cried Mrs. Ripon. 'Mr. Gower was a gentleman born and brought

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up, and a fine handsome man he'd have been but for the drink. Mr. Lyon tried to cure him, and almost succeeded, but he fell back. Oh, it's a fearful thing, is the drink, miss. Mr. Lyon was dreadful cut up, I could see; he didn't say much, but I've got eyes in my head, as well as other folks. He has been looking for him everywhere since the fire, but can't find him. Someone saw him—I forget where, somewhere not very far off, though—quite drunk; but Mr. Lyon haven't set eyes on him.'

'Mr. Lyon doesn't seem to spend much time in his own home.'

'Well, he hasn't got what you'd rightly call a home; it ain't the house that makes the home, is it, miss? He haven't got any relations, father and mother and sisters; and as for marrying——'

Mrs. Ripon paused, the idea was such a new one.

'I declare I never thought of his marrying! he never will, I don't believe.'

'Why not?' asked Alison, amused.

'Good reason why, miss; he's so taken up with his work, one thing and another, that he'll never find time to go and look for a wife.'

'But he might come across one,' suggested Alison.

Mrs. Ripon shook her head. 'He'll never come across anyone good enough for him.'

'Is he so very fastidious, then?'

'He! I don't believe he even thinks about it; but I mean she'd have to be some one rare out of the common to *make* him think about it.'

'Oh,' said Alison, laughing, 'I understand.'

Mrs. Ripon would have gone on talking about Mr. Lyon indefinitely, but Miss Wycherley changed the subject; she did not care to make him the topic of conversation any longer; indeed, she felt annoyed with herself for allowing it so long. What was it to her how this printer, as she rather contemptuously called him, employed his time, or what possible interest could she have in his home relationships? So she introduced her object in sending for Mrs. Ripon, and asked her if she could do fine sewing. Ringing the bell, she sent for a basket of work and showed her what she wished to have done. Some of it was easy enough, but some was rather intricate, and Mrs. Ripon shook her head doubtfully.

'I'm 'most afraid of those little tucks and things,' she said.

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'I don't like to undertake it, miss, though I'd be glad to if I could.' She looked despondingly at it, for the pay Alison mentioned was enough to tempt her. Suddenly her face brightened, and she put the work down. 'Rose can do it, I'll be bound,' she exclaimed.

'Who is Rose?'

'She's another friend of Mr. Lyon's; he brought her to me, and now she lives with me. She's wonderful quick with her fingers, miss, and will do it beautifully, I've no doubt, if you'll please try her.'

'I will try her, willingly, though it was you I wished to employ.'

'It's very much the same, miss, if you don't mind. Rose and I go shares, pretty even; we have one purse. You see, she don't earn as much as me by a good bit; I can't always get work for two. We take it in turns, and there's lots to do in the house, and while one's at the feathers, the other gets dinner, and sees to the children, and all that.'

'Then you shall take it all, and see what you can do. You must find little Sybil a great expense, I am sure.'

'She haven't been one bit of expense yet, miss; I've been paid for her regular.'

'By whom?' asked Alison, expecting to hear Lyon's name again.

'I don't know, miss. By her father, I suppose. The money is sent; sometimes by post, sometimes it is left at the door at night; it was thrown in once.'

'It is quite a romantic story,' said Alison, stroking the soft fair hair of the child at her feet. 'You will miss her when she is claimed.'

'That I shall, miss! I don't like to think of it. But I do hope her father won't be some scamp who will learn her all sorts of bad ways; that would break my heart, I do believe.'

'She is so pretty; I wonder any father could part with her.'

'I just hope she'll grow up ugly!' was the energetic reply. 'A child in her position hadn't no call to be so pretty. Why, as I brought her along to-day all the folks were turning to look at her. She's too young to notice now, but she'll grow, and then she'll notice fast enough.'

It was growing dusk before Alison bethought herself of her father, waiting for his afternoon game at draughts, a—to him —very poor substitute for chess. Taking the children with

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her, she went down and found him walking impatiently up and down the dining-room.

'Papa, here are two young ladies come to see you,' she said gaily, leading them forward, 'Miss Ripon, and Miss——' she paused, remembering Sybil's nameless condition.

The old gentleman held out his hand, and Sybil clung to it, looking up with merry eyes.

'I does like your white hair,' she said. 'May I thit on your knee?'

'Certainly, my little girl,' replied Mr. Wycherley, half embarrassed by the novelty of the request, but gratified by the child's unexpected friendliness. He lifted her on his knee, and did his best to amuse her. Long forgotten nursery rhymes were hunted up, and the old gentleman himself grew quite excited over the train of incident consequent upon the refusal of the little old woman's pig to get over the stile. Alison sat and laughed, and the children grew wild with the fun.

It was tea-time at last, and then Alison sent them home in a cab, with their arms full of treasures, and a promise that they should come again another day. She quite missed them when she went back to the quiet drawing-room, and then for the first time came the wish that Sybil were her own little sister to nurse and love and pet.

Sitting down before the fire she gazed dreamily into the glowing embers, and in imagination followed them home, trying to fancy the children's delight and their mother's more quiet satisfaction. She tried to picture this Rose they had spoken of, and wondered how and why she was a friend of Mr. Lyon's. His name brought a host of thoughts, and she wondered if he would hear all about the visit, and what he would think of it.

'There was no self-denial in it,' she thought, disdainfully, 'so he will not approve. If I had gone there, and sat an hour or two in Mrs. Ripon's little room, and taken the work with me, he would think I was doing my duty, perhaps; as it is, it will all be put down as a freak, another phase of self-indulgence. I wanted a little novelty, so I had them all here.'

'They are nice little children,' said her father, interrupting her train of thought.

'Very: they are dear little things! I shall have them here again, papa.'

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'Just as you please, my dear; it will do them good, poor little things.'

'Their mother is such a sensible woman. I wish I could do more to help her; her life is such a struggle.'

'And yet she looked happy enough.'

'She *is* happy; that is what puzzles me! Papa, how can anyone be happy under such circumstances?'

'They are used to it, I suppose.'

'So are we used to the unpleasant things of our life, but they have their effect on us, for all that. We are used to being without Guy, but we are not happy without him.'

Her eyes rested wistfully, as she spoke, upon a pictured face upon the wall. The face of a young man, with large blue eyes full of a merry careless light, and fair hair, waving back from a broad white forehead, and a slight moustache shading a mouth full of character, handsome, yet sensitive as a woman's.

Mr. Wycherley sighed and resumed his book. Alison was silent for a few minutes, but soon began again: she was in a talkative mood.

'Papa, Mr. Lyon is a printer; a sort of foreman, not a common printer.'

'Ah, that accounts for his superiority; he has had so many opportunities for reading.'

Alison looked doubtful. 'Reading doesn't make people superior; it is the superiority which makes them read. He has wonderful influence over those dreadful lower classes; they send for him when there is a fight, or anything of that sort. They are afraid of him, and yet they like him.'

'Very likely; he is just the sort of man to have that sort of influence.'

'I wonder how it is. Papa, fancy Mr. Randolph trying to stop a fight between two angry cabmen.'

The picture conjured up was not very complimentary to Mr. Randolph, and Alison laughed at the vision.

'Mr. Randolph is a gentleman; it is not likely he would have any influence.'

'I don't see that, papa; it is superiority of some sort that gives influence, and if a gentleman is not superior, what is the use of being a gentleman?'

'There are different sorts of superiority: mental, physical, moral, and social.'

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'And the three first are nothing without the last. Papa, it seems to me this is a very queer world; what is really of value we think little of, and what is mere accident is extolled to the skies.'

'Not always, my dear. Many of our greatest men have raised themselves by their own exertions, and by mental superiority won social too. It is a law of nature that mind must find its level.'

'I wonder what is Mr. Lyon's level. I wonder what my level is, papa.'

'That of an ordinary cultivated English gentlewoman, I hope; I do not wish you to find any other, my dear.'

This was not exactly what Alison had meant, but as she scarcely knew what she did mean, she was silent.

'I wonder if every cultivated English gentlewoman feels as I do,' she thought. 'It is all very well to be a good pianist and linguist, and all that; but it doesn't seem enough for a lifetime. I haven't anything to do half my time, and I am tired of doing nothing. There is no satisfaction in working for bazaars; they would get as much money as they wanted if one didn't work. I would far rather give things to such people as that nice Mrs. Ripon; but she has enough clothes to last her a long time, and I don't know any others who really want. If I see Mr. Lyon, I will ask him. I daresay he has a list a yard long.'

A ring at the bell disturbed her meditations, and Mr. Randolph came in with tickets for a concert, and entreaties that she would allow him to escort her if Mr. Wycherley were not able to go. But Mr. Wycherley was able, and willing, and in the pleasure of hearing the finest voices of the day, Alison forgot all about the inhabitants of Abbey-court; and her philanthropic impulse was, for the time, laid at rest.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EX-CONVICT.

AT the time appointed the ex-convict Martin, or, as he called himself, Forset, appeared at Lyon's door. He was shown up to Lyon's room, where he sat down, listening to the sound of boyish voices upstairs, and in the opposite rooms.

Presently Lyon came in, and the man rose awkwardly.

'Sit down, Martin; draw your chair close to the fire and make yourself at home. I have been busy with my new boys this last hour. They are all in bed now, though not asleep, as you can hear,' said Lyon, anxious to put the man at his ease.

Muttering something quite unintelligible he sat down, twirling his cap in his hands.

'In the first place, how are the bruises?'

'Oh, they're all right, thanks to you, guv'ner,' was the rough reply. 'I've come, you see, but I can't stay long; so if you've got anything to say to a chap, please cut it short. It's about *her*, I s'pose?'

It was not a very promising beginning, but Lyon was used to such customers, and was in no way discouraged. Drawing a chair forward he sat down, and in as few words as possible, told how his acquaintance with Sam's mother had commenced. Then he followed up her history; told how she had sunk from stage to stage; how, at first, she had struggled against the fatal power, but at last had given in. He spoke of the hardships she and the boy had endured, the struggle for daily bread, the suffering, and want, and sin; and then he spoke of her death, and the man turned away his rough face as he listened.

It was no pleasant thing to hear of a stranger, much less of the woman he had called wife; and hardened as he was, he could not listen wholly unmoved.

'Ah, well, poor old gal, she's gone,' he said, at last. 'It's no use crying over spilt milk, is it, mister?'

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'No; but we may be careful not to spill any more. What have the ten years done for you, Martin?'

'Not much good, you may be bound,' was the surly reply.

'Ten years are a good piece out of a man's life; it's a long time to work for other people.'

Martin looked up. 'If there was any way of paying them for it!' he said, savagely.

'Well, there is a very good way,' replied Lyon, coolly. 'I would pay them for it if I were you.'

'What would you do?'

'I would make such a man of myself that I might walk straight into a police-station and dare any man to touch me. I'd put myself out of their power.'

'That ain't the sort I want.'

'No; you would rather put it in their power to give you another ten years.'

'I'm not such a fool as that.'

'We shall see; I hope not. I will help you to keep clear of them if you like.'

'A man ain't got no chance.'

'Yes he has, if he likes to use it. Come, Martin, look at things in a sensible matter-of-fact way. You have tried one sort of life, and it has proved a failure; now try another. Give it a chance at any rate.'

'Give what a chance?'

'An honest life; you'll find it pay in the long run. Besides, I want your boy to be proud of his father.'

'What sort of a little chap is he?' asked the father, with some interest.

'A sharp, clever little fellow; one of my best scholars.'

Going across the room, Lyon fetched a copy-book. 'Look here, these are his copies.'

Martin took the book and turned over the pages.

'You don't mean to say the little beggar did all these himself,' he said, in a tone of gratified astonishment.

'He did; and first rate they are for a boy of his age.'

'Did you teach him?'

'Yes; he has been in my class for more than a year.'

'How do he get his living?'

'I've just got him a place as errand-boy,' said Lyon, who had determined to send Sam to the greengrocer's; 'and he comes

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here to sleep. I am hoping to make a clever, good man of him, but I want his father to help me.'

'I'm a likely one to help make a good man of him! You'd better ask me to send him to Heton right off!' scoffed Martin.

'I would rather he stayed here. What would you like the boy to be?'

'I'm not particular, do what you like with him.'

'But suppose he were left entirely to you, what would you wish to make of him?'

'Well, I'd like to put him in the way to get a decent living, of course; he's my own flesh and blood after all.'

'Well, I think if we set ourselves to work we can do that for the boy. Will you work with me, Martin?'

'What can I do?'

'Just this: make an honest, respectable man of yourself, and set him a good example. He's the sort of a lad who is easily led, and if you back me up, we can do almost anything with him. Let me be able to say, "Your father and I wish you to be honest, sober, and industrious," and it will have more effect than if I said I wished it. He's a tender-hearted little fellow, and missed his mother terribly.'

'Ay, poor little chap!' muttered Martin. 'I'll tell you what, guv'ner, I can't make no promises, 'cause they're made to be broke, folks say, but I'll say this much, I'll leave the boy alone; if I can't set him a good example, I won't set him a bad, and if you can make an honest man of him do it. I'm not going to stay in London; I'm off to Liverpool to-morrow, so he won't hear nothin' about his convict father.'

He rose to leave, with a dogged, determined look on his face.

'Would you like to see him?' asked Lyon: 'he is asleep, I expect.'

Going across the passage he opened the door and went into the room: the children were all fast asleep, and he beckoned Martin to follow. Sam's face was turned up toward the light, and as his father bent over him he awoke and opened his eyes.

'What do you want?' he asked, in a frightened voice. 'Who are you?'

With a suppressed oath Martin drew back, and stumbled out of the room. Without a word to Lyon he went downstairs and out into the night, never even turning his head. Lyon stood for a moment at the door looking after him, and

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a boy with his hands in his pockets, and his cap stuck jauntily at the back of his head, looked up in his face as he passed.

'A cold night, Winter.'

'The same remark Mr. Gower made about an hour ago,' replied the boy, with cool impudence. 'He sent his compliments and hopes you're quite well.'

Lyon made no reply: he thought the words were spoken out of sheer maliciousness, and that the boy knew no more than he about Gower. Winter loitered as if he expected to be questioned, as indeed he did, but no notice being taken of him, he walked on with a scowl. He had walked many miles for that chance of spiting Mr. Lyon, and the sense of defeat and disappointment made him bitterly angry.

As Lyon shut the door a figure, wrapped in a shawl, crept out of the adjoining doorway and followed the boy with rapid steps. On and on, through narrow streets and short cuts, through busy crowded thoroughfares, now on one side, now on the other, went the two; the boy never glancing behind him, the girl never taking her eyes off him. Sometimes he paused at a shop window, and she gladly seized the moment for rest, putting her hand to her side as if in pain, and panting for breath.

Suddenly he stopped at a dingy-looking gin-shop, and pushing open the door went in. The girl crept up and looked in. Close to the door stood a tall dark man, with refined features and slender well-formed hands which trembled visibly as he lifted his glass to his lips.

Winter touched his arm. 'Please, sir, it's half-past ten.'

'What! little custodian! you here already? Wait a bit, lad; I'm not ready yet.'

The boy drew back, and one of the men called to him, 'Here's a drink, Will,' and held out his gin invitingly. This attracted attention, and there was an immediate request for a song, the boy being evidently well known and a favourite. Nothing loth he began one of the popular bar-room songs of the day, singing it with marvellous sweetness and clearness. They all joined in the chorus, and when he had finished 'hencored' it vociferously.

'Give him a glass,' cried a burly, superior-looking man, already too intoxicated to speak without a hiccough. 'Wish I had such a pipe of my own! he's a regular whistler.'

Winter took the glass and drank its contents with eager

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avidity, and its effect was evident in his flushed cheek and the increased brilliancy of his large dark eyes. Again he sang, and again they gave him as the price of his sweet child-voice the fiery draught of gin. But as he took it greedily, he suddenly paused, irresolute, glancing toward the man he had first addressed. His hesitation was brief: setting down the glass he turned away, saying he did not want any more. It was not said without an effort, and that a great one, and his eyes followed the glass wistfully as the donor raised it to his lips.

'You've had your chance, and it's your own fault you didn't take it,' said the man. 'The first time I ever heard you say No. What's come to you?'

'He's got to see *him* home, and it won't do for both to be shaky,' said another, with a laugh.

'What does Shakespeare say,—"Let the blind lead the blind"?—something of that sort; only in this case it's "Let the drunk lead the drunk,"—eh, Will?'

'If you stay here till there's one sober enough to lead you, you'll be tired,' retorted the boy.

Someone coming out banged the door to, and the girl could see no more; but in a minute the two came out, the man with his hand on the boy's shoulder to steady his staggering steps.

Drawing back she let them pass, and then followed. At the end of the street a crowd was collected; she saw them push their way in, and then she lost them. The crowd moved as she reached it, and she was carried along with it for some little distance; when she managed to extricate herself, the boy and his companion were out of sight.

It was useless to look for them, and with a sob of disappointment she wearily turned to retrace her steps. Alarmed to find it getting late, she hurried as fast as her tired limbs would carry her, and got into an omnibus.

Mrs. Ripon was seriously alarmed; eleven o'clock struck, and then the quarter, and still Rose was absent. Never before had the girl stayed out so late, and all sorts of fears presented themselves to her anxious heart. Then half-past struck, and she rose and put on her bonnet, determined to go and tell Mr. Lyon. As she pinned her shawl, a step was heard on the stairs, and she paused to listen. A weary, tired step, mounting slowly, and then the door opened, and shivering with exhaustion and cold, Rose staggered into the room, and sank down on the nearest chair with a quivering sob.

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'Oh, Rose, Rose!' cried Mrs. Ripon, half-sharply, half-thankfully. 'Where have you been? You've frightened me out of my senses, child! There, there, don't cry, dearie—don't; tell me all about it.'

And drawing the bowed head to her shoulder as she knelt beside the girl, she patted it with gentle, loving hands.

'I couldn't help it,' gasped Rose; 'I didn't think about the time. I wanted so to find him.'

'Him!—who?' demanded Mrs. Ripon, astonished.

'Mr. Gower.'

'Mr. Gower! Why you never saw him in your life. What did you want *him* for?' asked the little woman, more and more mystified.

'I didn't want him; I wanted to find him for Mr. Lyon. Don't be vexed with me,' and the tearful eyes looked up full of pathetic pleading.

It was some time before she could give a coherent account, and Mrs. Ripon listened in silence while she prepared a cup of hot coffee.

'There, dearie, don't think anything more about it,' she said at last, 'it was a wild-goose chase altogether, you see; 'tain't very likely you could follow them two.'

'But I could, if it hadn't been for the crowd,' sobbed Rose.

'You don't know; they'd soon have left you behind, 'specially at night. Mr. Lyon'll find him some day, never you fear.'

The next day Rose awoke with a violent cold, which kept her to her bed. Mrs. Ripon nursed her with motherly kindness, but her keen, practised eye soon saw that it was more than mere cold. She told Lyon this, and he listened with thoughtful face.

'That hack-hack of a cough ain't cold, sir,' she said; 'besides, there's her hands! I could tell by her hands. Oh, sir, it's plain enough to them that are used to it. I've had two sisters and a brother died in a decline, so I ought to know the signs.'

Lyon did not tell her that he had suspected it from the first, but he called at the doctor's on his way home, and asked him to call. He did not know how Rose had caught this cold; Mrs. Ripon, at the girl's urgent request, did not tell him.

She told him about her visit to Miss Wycherley, and the children eagerly brought out their new toys to show him.

'They've talked of nothing else since,' said their mother.

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'Miss Wycherley has 'witched 'em both. The old gentleman, too, he took a lot of notice of them, and told them some queer tales. I can't make head nor tale of them—not as the children tell 'em.'

'We're to go again, and again, and again,' put in Katie, triumphantly; 'lots of agains! Will you come too, Mr. Lyon?'

'Oh, do!' cried Sybil, clinging to his hand.

Lyon smiled as he patted the pretty head. 'That would be more than Mr. Wycherley bargained for. You shall come and have tea with me, some evening; will that do as well?'

When he arrived at his rooms he found Mr. Chester occupying his arm-chair.

'I have taken possession, you see,' he said, shaking hands. 'You are late.'

'I had a call to make,' said Lyon. 'I did not know you were here, or I would have come sooner.'

'Now don't let me disturb you; you are going to have your tea—may I ask for a cup?'

Lyon rang the bell, and Mother Willett's little maid came in with the teapot. He sent her back for another cup and saucer, and while she was away asked Mr. Chester to notice her. She was a quick, sharp-looking child, with bright black eyes and deft little fingers. Mr. Chester found that his scrutiny was repaid with interest.

'Well?' he said, interrogatively, as she left the room.

'Would you think that a twelvemonth ago that child was a hardened, insolent little thief, with scarcely any moral perception whatever?'

'No; was she?'

'Yes; I think I never met with such insolent defiance in my life as I received from that little girl.'

'And what magic wrought the change?'

'The magic of kindness and firmness; that is all. I caught her in the very act of stealing a scrap of meat from a butcher's stall, and put my hand on her shoulder as she was making off. The butcher was for sending her to prison; and she would have gone if I had not interfered.'

'Was that wise?'

'Judge for yourself. Suppose she had gone to prison, to a reformatory, what would have been the result?'

'Nay, I cannot say.'

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'Most probably she would have come out ten times worse than she went in. She would have come out marked for life, known to the police, and, to a certain extent, under constant surveillance. Nothing could be more destructive to any possibly remaining spark of self-respect. I told the man I would send her to a reformatory of my own, and he let me have her. You see the result.'

'I see the outward result; a nice, bright-looking little girl, with eyes as black as sloes. How about the inward reformation?'

'A success as far as I can tell yet. I sent her right away into the country to a man and woman who were once thieves themselves. They have a small farm in Kent, and undertake to teach and train any child I like to send them, boy or girl.'

'Ah, I expect there is more in that than meets the ear. A reformed thief teaching honesty! Well, it is only right. I should like to hear the history of those people.'

'Go down and see them; they will tell it you. Under their care, and with the help of God's lesson books, my little girl grew good, and happy, and child-like. I did not wish to bring her back to London, but Mother wanted a help, and I knew of no other girl just then. Besides, her place at the farm was wanted badly by an even worse case than hers; I hope it will turn out as well.'

'Do you believe in sending that class of children into private families?' asked Mr. Chester.

'It depends. I should not have sent Ellen there if there had been any children; but there were none. I believe that when God gives people no children of their own, He means for the place to be filled by those who are especially His care—the little homeless ones, who roam our great cities. I should like there to be no such thing in England as a childless home.'

'There would be a visible effect on our streets. How does your family get on?'

'Better than I hoped; eleven of them are employed as errand boys and helps, if you know what that means. They go round with costermongers and their carts and help them. They will be in directly, most of them, I expect.'

'Eleven of them? how about the twelfth?'

'Listen,' said Lyon, raising his finger. Stump, stump, stump, went the sound of a little crutch in the passage below. 'That is the twelfth,' he added.

'I see! poor little fellow. What sort of boy is he?'

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'Quiet, timid, and affectionate; easily influenced, and truthful as the daylight.'

'Why don't you send him to this farm?'

'Because he is not a thief; the stipulation is that I only send graduates in the school of theft. Poor little Dick is strictly honest.'

'Then what does he do?'

'Sells fusees—anything.'

'Hum. Where is the reading-room that is to be? I have come to see that.

Lyon took out his watch. 'Then we will walk at once, if you please. I have a meeting to-night.'

'Is there any night when you have not?' asked Mr. Chester, quaintly. 'Have you time to let me have a peep at your family arrangements.'

'Plenty,' and Lyon led the way into the opposite room. Mr. Chester looked round approvingly.

'Good: clean, tidy, and not packed; plenty of air. Let's go down.'

The room below shared his approbation, and he examined its various appliances with interest. The box with the slits excited his curiosity, and Lyon explained its use, whereupon he slipped a small silver coin in each, much to Dick's delight.

'Here are plenty of books,' said Lyon, opening a cupboard. 'And here are games—draughts, backgammon, spelicans, snap, and others. We believe in fun here, Mr. Chester, don't we, Dick?'

'That's a nice little fellow,' said Mr. Chester, as they went out. 'He seems as happy as a king. How is it you have been so successful in getting places for the others?'

'People will have them now they are clean and have a decent home to come to. What I begged for in vain for my dirty little street wanderers is volunteered willingly now. This is the room.'

It was a large, convenient place, used as a lumber-room, and half-filled with bags and boxes. On the other side of the passage were two small rooms, which would do well for the librarian.

'By the way, you said the librarian was found,' said Mr. Chester. 'Who is he? Another of your pets?'

'He was a gentleman once, an Oxford graduate, too; but drink has brought him to poverty. Would you like to see him? There is just time for a call.'

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'I should like to see him,' said Mr. Chester, with interest. 'I have often heard of gentlemen being found among the slums of London, but have scarcely been able to realize it. Have you met with many?'

'That depends upon what you call many. I could take you to-night to see a score at least who have come down from the respectable middle-class, and one or two were educated at Cambridge. I have only met about a dozen in my life, who ever belonged to the upper class. Not the aristocracy, though even they are to be found; but men who have mixed in good society, and all that sort of thing. Gentry, I suppose you would call them.'

'And this is one of that class?'

'Yes; but you need not know it; he is rather touchy.'

'I understand. Does he know; have you told him about the post?'

'No: I thought I had better wait a bit. We will tell him now, and hear what he says.'

They turned into a narrow alley, and stopped at a door halfway up. Lyon knocked, and a voice told him to come in. The place was so dark that Mr. Chester was almost afraid to step over the threshold; but Lyon walked forward, so he followed. Someone was trying to strike a match, and at last succeeded and lit a candle.

'Blind man's holiday, Mr. Lyon,' said the occupant of the room. 'The fact is, I was asleep when your knock awoke me. Take a seat near the fire.'

Stooping down the speaker poked the fire into a blaze, and rising, saw by its light that he had two visitors. In a moment his manner changed, and his tone grew cold and distant.

'Will you take a seat?' he said stiffly, drawing forward a chair.

'Mr. Chester: Mr. Langford,' said Lyon, introducing them as ceremoniously as if they stood on velvet pile, and Mr. Chester's bow was not more dignified than that of his new acquaintance.

'We have called on business,' continued Lyon, noting with some amusement Mr. Chester's embarrassment.

He was answered by a silent bow, and then he proceeded to explain the proposed plan of a free library. The old man listened with an interest which was evidently keen and real, entering into the scheme, and even proposing one or two altera-

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tions which would certainly be advantageous. When the proposal was made for him to take the post of librarian his face flushed and his hands slightly trembled. For some moments he did not speak, and then he said quietly,—

'You could not offer me any post that would suit me better, Mr. Lyon. I think I am fit for it; once books were my god, and I have not lost the old love. I shall grow young again in the familiar company of well-filled shelves.'

'I am afraid the contents of the shelves will hardly be such as you have been used to,' said Mr. Chester. 'But doubtless you will be able to cultivate and raise the taste of some of your readers.'

'Mr. Langford will make classical scholars of them, if they are to be made,' said Lyon, laughing. 'If the post suits him, it is equally certain that he suits the post.'

'The one necessitates the other,' said the old man, sententiously. 'I will do my best to raise the standard of literature among the poor fellows. A word by way of direction in the choice of a book has often had good effect.'

Lyon's watch warned him that it would not do to linger, though, seeing Mr. Chester's interest, he would gladly have stayed longer. At the top of the alley he paused.

'This is my way—that is yours,' he said. 'Shall we part here, or will you walk with me as far as the corner? It is not much further for you, and you can take an omnibus from the street beyond.'

'Won't you take me with you to your meeting?' suggested Mr. Chester, whose interest was too deeply awakened to be easily quieted. 'I'll tell you what it is, Lyon, I believe this sort of thing has a species of fascination. I don't feel inclined to go and shut myself up in my drawing-room now; I want to know more and see more of this mysterious lower world. You have infected me with something of your own spirit, and just at this present moment it seems to me that the end and aim of existence is to build libraries and refuges and schools and homes.' He spoke jokingly, but there was a strong undercurrent of meaning. In the same tone Lyon answered,—

'And thereby pull down two-thirds or more of our prisons and reformatories; we shall not need both. The home will supersede the reformatory, the library the prison.'

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CHAPTER XIX.

MR. CHESTER'S SPEECH.

'WELL, may I come to the meeting?' repeated Mr. Chester.

'Certainly; you may be a little restraint at first, but I will tell them you are a friend, who wishes to encourage and help the work of education. It will be all right as you are with me, but some of them are rough customers. It is a debating society.'

Mr. Chester looked astonished. 'Come, this promises to be intellectual.'

'Not very, though probably it will be amusing.'

'What is the subject of debate?'

'That I do not know yet. The committee take it in turn to introduce the subject, but, as a rule, no one knows beforehand what it is to be. They like the state of uncertainty; it suits their general habits of life better, I think.'

'And pray what are their habits?'

'Ah, I should like some of them to tell you! you would be astonished. You shall form your own opinion when you see the men.'

'I'm in for it!' said Mr. Chester, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders. 'Would you mind putting my watch in your pocket? I value it.'

Lyon laughed. 'They are not so bad as that. I'll guarantee the safety of your valuables.'

A few minutes' sharp walking brought them to the large room which Lyon used for his classes. It was very full, even the doorway being occupied by rough-looking men and boys of the costermonger tribe. They were in high spirits, and full of chaff, which was unsparingly lavished upon the more fortunate ones who had possession of the seats. On seeing Lyon there was a stir, and they moved to allow him to enter. One of

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ENTERING INTO THE SPIRIT OF THE THING, MR. CHESTER ROSE AND MADE A SPEECH.
See p. 201.

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them seemed inclined to bar Mr. Chester's entrance, but Lyon said, 'He is a friend of mine, Barton,' and he let him pass.

Arrived at the tiny platform, Lyon gave Mr. Chester the chair that had been reserved for himself, and then gave the signal for silence. The noisy tumult subsided by degrees, and at last even the crew at the door were subdued, by very vigorous sh-ing, to something like quiet.

It was the first time Mr. Chester had ever seen the British coster in his native freedom, and, with a comfortable sense of safety in Lyon's presence, he watched the scene before him with keen interest. There were young men, old men, and middle-aged; all in their customary attire, and with faces full of rough good humour. Some of them, however, looked rather doubtfully at the stranger, and Lyon hastened to reassure them.

'This is a friend of mine, and of yours,' he said. 'He is here to-night to make your acquaintance, and hear what use a costermonger can make of his tongue in a debate.'

'How's he a friend of ourn?' shouted a voice from the door.

'I will tell you. He has given me a cheque for the purpose of putting Tranter's room in rig for a free library for you. Isn't that a friendly act?'

There was a roar of applause, and turning to Mr. Chester, Lyon presented to him the unanimous thanks of the meeting. Entering into the spirit of the thing, Mr. Chester rose and made a speech. If anyone had told him that morning that he would address a company of costermongers in the evening, he would have scouted the idea. Nevertheless, he rose and spoke as if he were in his element.

'If a friendly spirit constitute a friend, I am one certainly,' he began. 'We often hear the expression, "I've just dropped in in a friendly manner to say how d'ye do." That is my case. I did not mean to come here to-night. An hour ago I knew nothing about the meeting; but here I am—in a friendly way—just dropped in to say how d'ye do.'

The tone as much as the free-and-easy words suited the men, and they cheered vociferously.

'Mr. Lyon has mentioned the free library, so I will say a few words about it. I am a great advocate for education: I hold that no man can make headway in the world without it, and I sincerely hope and trust the day is not far distant when every boy and girl in the land will be taught to read and write. Of course a great many of you can read, and you like to read;

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I know that. Every intelligent man likes to know what is going on in the world, whether he be a count or a costermonger, and of course you are intelligent men. Now I am a publisher, and of course know a great deal about books and education, so when, about a week ago, Mr. Lyon told me he wanted a free library for his friends down here, a comfortable room where they could go and enjoy their newspaper——'

'And a pipe?' queried a voice.

'That I leave to Mr. Lyon; he knows best; my business is only to follow where he leads. When he told me this, I said that if he would do his part, I would do mine; if he would organize and work, I would find ways and means. I am not going to make a speech, but I will say that I hope every man and boy here will find his way to the free library, where I will take care he shall find books that will interest, amuse, and instruct.'

They cheered as he sat down, and then Lyon rose, and signing for silence, said, 'Mr. James Dent will introduce the subject for debate.'

There was a slight stir, and a young man with a shock head of hair of a flaming colour rose from his seat, and after a preliminary cough, which was evidently meant to impress upon his hearers his painful bashfulness, but which lamentably failed in its purpose, opened the debate.

'Ladies and gentlemen, Christian friends.'

Lyon looked at him, and he paused.

'Against the rules, Jim,' said a voice.

'Then I'll begin again: Men and brethren, after a-turning the matter over in my mind, and looking around me for to notice the ups and downs of life, and a-improving of them as the tract says, I've come to this conclusion, that costers are divided into two classes—them as drinks and them as don't.'

Prolonged applause, under cover of which Lyon whispered to Mr. Chester that the speaker was a recent convert to total abstinence.

'Being a new hand, he does his work well at present, and I have great hope that he will continue to do so. He is a licensed wit, too, and can say things other men dare not.'

'Wall, to continue, as the story-books says. I'm going to stand up to-night fur them as don't drink; anyone as likes can stand up fur them as do, when I've done. I says this, that the coster as drinks ain't got no hold on hisself; and a coster

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what ain't got no hold on hisself, ain't likely to git a hold on other folks; so as things generally turn about, they'll get a hold on him. I'll give a hillustration, as the nobs says at Exeter 'all. Here's a coster wot's got his own barrer, and a comfortable room, and his old woman's got her tidy gown and shawl to her shoulders, and they peg on as 'appy as a costering pair need. Wall, he takes to drink, and instead of bringing home the day's yarnings, off he goes and spends 'em in gin. It's very nice, ain't it? Oh, yes, it makes one feel so comfortable inside, and so jolly altogether, don't it? And then he goes home, and there ain't nothin' to eat; but he don't care, he's full of drink—but his old woman do; she's hungry, and off she goes with summat out of the home, and pawns it for food. Wall, he goes on a-drinking and she a-pawning, till there ain't nothin' left 'cept the barrer, so he sells that, and has to hire. Then the old woman says, "There ain't no comfort in life now; I'll see what drink'll do for me." So she drinks too, and so it goes on, getting wusser and wusser, till they ain't got a penny to their name. Blessed if I knows wot to do with 'em now!'

Having got his illustration thus far, the orator did not quite know how to proceed, but there were plenty to help him out of the difficulty.

'Why he 'saulted the p'lice, o' course!' cried one; 'and was sent to the steel.* That 'ud do for him for a time.'

'Him an' his old woman went to the workus,' shouted another; and as one after another filled up Dent's picture the uproar became deafening.

'Anyhow,' shouted Dent, 'other folks got a hold on him, whether 'twas in prison or the workus.'

''Twouldn't if he hadn't been a fool,' said a big, burly fellow, rising. On seeing him there was a hush, and he continued,—

'I say Jim Dent's man wur a fool! he could ha' drunk without coming to a full stop in the steel. Wot I says is this, if a chap can't take his glass friendly like, and make hisself sociable, he ain't half a man.'

This popular sentiment was rapturously received, and triumphant glances were cast at the champion of total abstinence, who sat listening with evident impatience.

'Why, bless the chap, would he take away the only bit o' comfort many a better man than he have got in the world?

* Prison.

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Wot's the grand home he talks about—eh? More like a pigsty, an' the kids crawling about like so many pigs! It's hard if we ain't to go an' enjoy our glass after a-working like niggers all day; an' that's wot some folks would have us do. Home, sweet home's wery pretty to sing, but it ain't no go in real nater.'

'That's just it,' exclaimed Dent, taking advantage of a momentary pause. 'It ain't no go 'cause of the drink; it's that that does it.'

'Not allus, my lad,' said a grave-looking man by his side; 'there's other things 'side drink as knocks all the homeness out of a home.'

'So there may be, but most times it's drink, now ain't it, Steady?'

'Wall, may be 'tis most times,' was the cautious reply.

'There!' said Dent, triumphantly, looking round. 'If old Steady says so you may be sure and certain it ain't far wrong.'

'Who's old Steady?' whispered Mr. Chester.

'He used to be one of the worst and most incorrigible drunkards in the neighbourhood, but there was this to be said, he had a wretched home. His wife took to drink before he did, and literally drove him away from home. Then he went at it, and they lived a fearful life till about three years ago, when she was burnt to death while in a state of intoxication. It had such an effect upon him that he gave up drink altogether, except an occasional half-pint of beer. Steady is a nickname of course. Look, he's going to speak.'

The man had risen, and was leaning on the back of the seat before him.

'I ain't much of a talker, nor wot you calls a horator; wot I've got to say I says straight out, as most on you knows. As Jim have brought up the subject of drink, I'll jest say what I thinks on it, and then I'll sit down. If you wants to make a poor, weak, useless sort o' chap of yourself, *drink;* if you wants to make your children afraid of you, *drink;* if you wants a short life, *drink;* if you wants to make a beast of yourself—the beasts forgive me—*drink;* if you want the devil to walk 'longside of you till you're ready for him, *drink.* That's my 'pinion on the subject, and, though I can't debate, as the young 'uns call it, I can give my thoughts, and there they be.'

'Steady's right; it do make a beast of a man.'

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'Not a bit of it,' cried Dent. 'Hoffer your old hoss a pint of old Tom and he'll turn up his nose at it!'

'Yes, 'cause he ain't got sense like us.'

'He've got instinct, and that's better than some folk's sense,' maintained Dent, stoutly.

'He'd like it fast enough if he was used to it.'

'Then let him get used to it, and see what sort of a hoss he'll be; why shouldn't a drunken hoss be as good as a drunken man?'

Some of the men seemed to think this a clencher, and laughed, but the answer was ready:—

'My old hoss is welcome to get drunk when his work's done, not afore. I gets drunk when my work's done, and he may do the same.'

This would-be witty reply was received with loud cheers from the opposition, and just at that moment Lyon caught sight of a face at the door, a face he knew well. He had stepped off the platform to speak to one of the men standing by, for not only the seats, but every available piece of ground was occupied, and without exciting general observation, he pushed his way out. When he reached the door the face was gone.

He went out, and looking down the street saw a tall slight figure pass under a lamp. In a moment he followed, but could not overtake it. The man seemed to know he was being followed, and hurried on with rapid steps; now diving into a narrow street, now lost for a moment among a crush of vehicles. But wherever he went Lyon followed, assured in his own mind that it was Gower. Suddenly he came to a full stop; the man had disappeared. He looked round puzzled and disappointed; the moment before he had been full in view, and now he was gone! It was not a crowded street; it was comparatively a quiet one, and there seemed no outlet by which he could have escaped.

Walking up to the spot on which he had seen him he found a narrow two-feet opening between two houses, leading to a network of alleys. He did not enter; there were too many outlets to admit of the slightest chance of finding anyone, so he returned to the room.

He found he had only been absent five and twenty minutes. Mr. Chester had never missed him, and was listening with great interest to the speech of a fine-looking young fellow who was trying to prove that a man could drink without getting drunk,

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or even failing that, could get drunk without any evil consequences to anyone.

It was a poor attempt, and Dent and his partisans listened with calm contempt, fully realizing the immeasurable superiority of their own position. This was rather aggravating to the other side, and some of them began to grow warm. But Lyon knew when and where to check, and his few occasional words kept order and peace till the meeting was over.

'Now,' said Mr. Chester as they went down the street, 'tell me what good you think will result from that meeting.'

'One great good for a certainty,' replied Lyon, smiling. 'Your interest is aroused.'

'Ah well, that may not be so good as you think. But I mean with regard to the men.'

'No doubt it has strengthened the total abstinence party: if I am not very greatly mistaken it has a warm ally in old Steady now, and that is no trifle. Then who can tell what influence it has had upon the boys? they cheered Dent most enthusiastically. I saw a number of my boys there, and shall very likely hear more of it from them. It is scarcely what you expected, I suppose?'

'Well, I did not expect anything; I had no idea whatever, except from the word "debate," and certainly it was very different from all my preconceived ideas of a *debate*.'

'They like freedom, and it would not do to shackle them with too much restraint, too many rules. So long as they keep the peace, I let them go their own way pretty much. They are rather a rough lot, and very ignorant, but as a class they are honest, especially among themselves. They rather pride themselves on being true to each other.'

'There are some characters among them, I should say. But, Lyon, how do they manage to drink? it is an expensive luxury, and they don't look very well able to afford luxuries.'

'Men, and women, too, will drink, whatever they go without. I could take you to a small space of land not very far from here, where there is, taking it in the rough, a population of over twenty thousand costermongers, beggars, thieves, tramps, street-sellers, the poorer sort of shopkeepers, and others of like class and character, the poorest of the poor; and yet in the midst of them upwards of eighty-three public-houses flourish, and their owners grow rich. The fact is, drink is the evil genius of the day; the ogre, the giant of our childhood, magnified ten thou-

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sand times, and still crying more, more, as he closes his insatiable jaws upon thousands and thousands of lost and ruined lives.'

'Parliament should see to it,' said Mr. Chester.

'So it would if half its members were working men,' replied Lyon, emphatically. 'I doubt whether it will ever touch the evil as it is.'

'What do you mean?'

'How came gambling houses to be put down with such an iron hand?'

'Because the nation was roused to the evil, and saw the immense harm they were doing.'

'Nothing of the sort; the nation did not do it. Parliament did it.'

'Doesn't Parliament represent the nation?'

'Not in that case, certainly. Do you think that if gambling had been a poor man's vice, it would have been put down? Not it! It touched *them*, their class; they saw their own sons, brothers, friends ruined by it and they rose *en masse*, and bound the tyrant hand and foot. It was a personal matter.'

'I'd exterminate half the public-houses in the land if I had my will.'

'I'd exterminate more than half,' replied Lyon, significantly. 'It is my belief that if ever a working man's Parliament were to come into fashion there would be a marvellous rooting out all over the land. Of course I mean the intelligent, educated working man, with all his class sympathy in arms, and his Bible for his guide.'

'But all intelligent working men are not red-hot teetotallers.'

'No; but they all admit that drunkenness is the crying sin of the day, and if the power were in their own hands they would do something to lessen it. Gambling is not entirely done away with, but it is sensibly checked.'

Mr. Chester shook his head. 'Drink is a hydra-headed monster.'

'And yet Hercules slew the hydra.'

'Ah, but unfortunately there is no modern Hercules; and if there were I doubt if he could find the root of this monster's head.'

They were passing a gin-shop, and out of the swinging doors came a woman, with a child in her arms; a wee-faced, wan little creature, with sunken eyes, and the pitiful expression of vacancy so often seen in the drunkard's child.

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Wildly drunk, the woman reeled forward and almost fell Lyon put out his hand to save her, and the child uttered a faint cry.

'What's the matter?' cried the mother, hugging it in her arms. 'Mammy won't hurt yer; ye're mammy's little devil! Say mammy's little devil! say it! Say mammy's little devil.' And as the baby lips lisped the awful words she laughed loudly, and disappeared among the busy crowd.

Mr. Chester looked at Lyon. 'Is she human?'

'She loves the child.'

'So do the beasts love their young! What possible chance is there of such a creature as that being reformed? Is there any?'

'I should not dare to say *no;* what do I know of the power of God? He has saved worse.'

'But He will not save against her will, and I should say she was too debased to even wish for better things.'

'You must not judge her as you would one born in another class. The language she used was what she has been accustomed to from her own babyhood, no doubt. Why, she kissed the child while she called it her little devil; it was a term of endearment to her.'

'It is shocking! truly shocking! Such things as these tempt one to distrust God's mercy, Lyon.'

'What would you have Him do?'

'Put an end to the sin and misery.'

'And so He will, some day; we must wait His time and do our part. He has entrusted some of the work to us.'

'That is throwing the responsibility on our shoulders.'

'Do you think that if every Christian man and woman in this world did their duty, there would be as much sin and misery as there is?'

'Of course not.'

'Then there is a very heavy responsibility resting upon us.'

'Well, the harvest is plentiful enough,' said Mr. Chester, grimly, pointing to another reeling, unconscious drunkard.

'And the labourers are few.'

'I am afraid you are right,' replied Mr. Chester, stumbling over a little stooping figure. 'Bless me, child, why don't you stand up?' he exclaimed, recovering his equilibrium.

The child lifted up a little woe-begone face, down which the big tears were slowly rolling, and was about to dart off when

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Lyon put out his hand and stopped her. On seeing him she smiled through her tears, and stood still.

'What is it, Sallie?' he asked, taking the dirty little hand in his, and bending his head with an air of protection very reassuring to the frightened child.

'Carroty Meg trod on my foot 'cause I wouldn't give her my apple,' was the almost inaudible reply.

'Let me look at the apple.'

Slowly a rotten, unwholesome-looking russet, a disgrace to the name of apple, was drawn from its hiding-place among the rags which constituted the little damsel's garments.

'She isn't going to eat *that?*' exclaimed Mr. Chester, putting his hand in his pocket.

The little face lengthened considerably.

'Now, now, don't cry, there's a good child! Here's sixpence to buy some good fruit: oranges, or anything you like, only don't eat that rotten stuff.'

The child clutched at the sixpence with an expression of incredulous delight, but did not drop the apple.

'The gentleman has bought the apple, Sallie,' said Lyon; 'you must do as he wishes.'

Very slowly and reluctantly the rotten fruit was dropped on the pavement, whence Mr. Chester gave it a kick which sent it into the middle of the street.

'No going after it, mind, Sallie,' said Lyon, warningly, noting the longing look that followed it.

'Do you know everybody in this part of London?' asked Mr. Chester, somewhat quizzically, as they walked on.

'Not quite! That little woman is earning her own living; you would scarcely believe it possible, would you?' replied Lyon, thoughtfully.

'It is difficult to realize it! What does she do?'

'She is one of the nobody's children, and lives with a woman who sends her out in the morning with a stock of anything that's in season and cheap: oranges, apples, cresses, or flowers, according to the time of year. She treats her pretty well upon the whole, but as she often has to go without food herself, of course the child must go without too.'

'The child ought to have been in bed and fast asleep long ago,' said Mr. Chester, a sudden vision rising before him of a little golden-haired darling, now sleeping the dreamless sleep of happy childhood in the nursery at home, and a mist clouded

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his eyes as he in imagination saw her bending over a bruised and wounded foot in the pitiless streets of London at eleven o'clock at night. 'God forbid!' he murmured; 'and yet that little one is as precious to her Maker as my bonnie little Frida!'

'You will not say there is nothing new under the sun after to-night,' said Lyon, as they paused where their ways parted.

'There is very much that is new to me in this great city of ours, Lyon,' said Mr. Chester, sadly. 'It is one thing to read, another to see with your own eyes. I am glad I came. If you want to convert men to philanthropy take them into our streets at night; show them the starving, shivering children, the reckless, degraded parents! It is not altogether new to me, of course, but somehow it comes home to me to-night.'

He did not say why, but perhaps that golden-haired darling at home had something to do with it; his youngest and pet, his bonnie wee Frida. These little ones have rare power sometimes.

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CHAPTER XX.

'I BELONG TO MYSELF.'

IT was Gower whom Lyon had followed and lost. A curious fascination had drawn him to the spot where he had hoped to listen unseen. Winter had told him of the meeting, but little thinking that he would go to it.

He went out of curiosity more than anything else; to hear what Lyon would say on a subject he was so well able to handle; for Winter and James Dent were on friendly terms, and the subject of debate had oozed out.

Instinct more than knowledge told him that he was seen, and he hurried away only just in time. He reached home boisterously exultant.

'I have been into the lion's den, my boy,' he said, clapping Winter on the shoulder. 'I'm a second Daniel! not a wound, not a scratch! What dost think of that?'

The boy laughed and tossed his head. 'I've been pretty close too, but he didn't touch me. I'm not afraid of him.'

'If he had you, Robin, he'd have his hands full. But you are not a promising subject, I am afraid. Put some coal on, and let us have a blaze. I hate a dingy fire.'

He drew his chair close and held out his hands with a shiver. 'It's cold out—freezing! What have you been doing with yourself all day?'

The boy sat on the floor opposite him, gazing into the mouldering embers.

'I?' he said, starting. 'Oh, lots of things, sir.'

Gower sat for some time in silence, watching his face.

'What are you thinking of?' he asked suddenly, and again the boy started.

'Who was Daniel?' he said, turning toward him with questioning eyes.

Gower stared. 'Daniel who?'

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'You said you were a second Daniel, because you had been in the lion's den.'

'Oh! surely you know who Daniel was.'

'No, I don't. I've seen pictures of lion-tamers of course; but I don't remember their names. Was he a lion-tamer?'

'Yes—no; they were tamed for him. Why, you little heathen! you don't mean to say you have never heard of *him!* How have you been brought up?'

'How should I know who he was? who's to tell me?'

'But you can read.'

'Yes, but I haven't got every book that ever was printed,' retorted the boy. 'How am I to know who Daniel was?'

'Why, it's a Bible story, the delight of my childhood. Haven't you ever read the Bible?'

'No. Granny had one afore she died: I never touched it.'

'Well, Daniel was a man who was cast into a lions' den because he would pray to his God, and the lions would not touch him.'

'Tame lions.'

'No.'

'Then, why wouldn't they touch him?'

'Because his God wouldn't let them, I suppose.'

'Oh, it's a sort of fairy tale?'

'No, it is not; at least, so I was taught. It is quite true.'

'I don't believe it,' said Winter, defiantly.

'Well, who asked you to? What a fiery little chap you are. When I was your age I believed it.'

'And you don't now?'

Gower paused before answering. 'Yes, I do,' he said at last. 'It is the force of habit, I suppose.'

He spoke as if thinking aloud, and the boy looked at him curiously; he had gone where he could not follow.

'When you were as old as me you went to school, I s'pose?'

'Yes; they were happy days, Robin,' he replied, with a sigh.

The boy looked enviously at him. 'I haven't had any happy days,' he muttered.

'Poor little chap! No, I suppose not. Have you been in the streets all your life? Come, suppose you tell me your history—your life and adventures.'

'But there's nothing to tell.'

'I know better than that; you have not lived eleven years

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without having something of a history. How far back can you remember?'

'I was a little chap when I first came to Granny. I can't mind anything afore that.'

'Was she kind to you?'

'She was after Mr. Lyon got hold of her; not afore.'

'What did she do to you?'

'She used to send me out selling things, and if I didn't take home enough money she'd lick me. I ran away three times, and then I got bigger and didn't care. That was afore Mr. Lyon knew her.'

'Don't say *afore;* say *before.* Well, go on.'

'I don't know what to tell you,' replied the boy, hesitatingly. 'You won't care to hear about the hopping.'

'Yes, I do care; what about it?'

'I joined the hoppers last year and had jolly fun, but I nearly got caught once. Me and Ned, next door, got over a wall to get some apples, and the man came racing after us and laid hold of my leg and hauled me indoors. My! I thought I was done for then! He shook me and locked me in a room, and went off to fetch a blue.'

'A policeman?'

'Yes; but his wife come and let me out. She said I was too handsome to be real bad, and I should have one more chance, at any rate.'

Gower looked at him, amused. 'Do you think you are handsome?'

'I don't know,' was the indifferent reply. 'Women say so.'

Whatever faults the boy had, vanity, evidently, was not one of them.

'How many times have you been in prison?'

'Only once. I'm too sharp for that!' said Robin, with pride. 'It ain't so easy to grab me.'

'How did they do it that once then?'

'That wasn't my fault; it was the drink. A boy I know has been in prison five times, and he's no bigger than me.'

'He's a thief, I suppose? Look you here, Robin, don't you let me hear anything of that sort of you, there's a good lad. We shall have to part company if I do.'

'S'pose I can't get along without it, sir?'

'That's nonsense,' said Gower, authoritatively. 'No one is obliged to steal.'

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'But why should they have such a lot of good things and me nothing?' said Robin, angrily. 'They won't give me anything, so I take it; it's all right.'

'It's all wrong! I wonder where your morals are! Have you any?'

'I don't know what you mean; but if you mean that it's wrong to grab a bit of toke, or anything else you want when there's no other way of getting it, then I don't believe a word of it. Who says it's wrong—the beaks? A precious lot they knows about it! Jest put one of 'em in my place, with nothing to eat, and see if he won't grab something! I guess he will.'

'It isn't the beak, as you call it, who says it is wrong, you little heathen. Don't you know who says, "Thou shalt not steal"?'

'Whoever it was He knew jest nothing about it,' said the boy, bluntly. 'I can gen'ally get money, but there has been times when it's been steal or starve, and I ain't such a fool as to starve if I can help it. I jest wish them as make them laws 'ud step here and larn what it is to be hungry, that's all! I guess they'd alter *that* law pretty quick.'

Gower looked at him doubtfully. Could such ignorance be real, or was it assumed? He could scarcely believe it possible that in the enlightened nineteenth century any boy of his age could know so little of the commonest Bible truths, of the simplest moral obligations.

'Do you know anything about God?' he asked, presently, looking upon his ignorance merely as an interesting fact, and seeing nothing of its pathos.

'I know He made me, but I can't see what He did it for. Mr. Gower, do you think it's fair to go shoving fellers into the world, whether they want to come or not?'

'How is He to know whether they want to or not?' replied Gower, not exactly knowing what answer to make. If he had given utterance to his own thoughts he would have said 'No, it is not fair! it is cruel and unjust?' but something held back the words. There was a vague feeling of unfairness to the boy in saying anything that would prejudice him against God.

'Don't trouble your head about what God did before you were born,' he continued, bitterly; 'it is as much as you can manage to attend to what He is doing now.'

Robin looked up quickly. 'What is He doing now?'

'Well, He is keeping me here, for one thing.'

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'I thought it was the drink,' replied the boy, wistfully.

'He might have kept me from it, I suppose.'

'But you *will* take it; how can anyone help it?'

'You don't know anything about it, child,' said Gower, impatiently.

Robin was silent for a bit, nursing his knee and gazing into the fire.

'He is good to some folks, isn't He?' he suddenly asked.

'Who? God? Yes.'

'Then why isn't He good to all? He made them all, didn't He? It isn't fair.'

Again that strange feeling came over Gower. He was a man, old enough to judge for himself, and if he defied God's power, it was his own look-out; but this child knew nothing of God, and was therefore incapable of forming an opinion: was it fair to him to present only such views of God as should lead him to hate Him? Some had found Him a Divine Father, then why not this boy? It would be better for him if he could. Influenced by this thought, he answered hastily—'He will be good to you, I daresay, if you are a good boy. It is He who says you are not to steal. Mind you don't.'

'Then why don't He give me something to eat?' said Robin, evidently inclined to argue the question out.

'I will tell you what He has done,' said Gower, a sudden thought striking him. 'He has ordered those people who have plenty to give to those who have nothing. He is more fair than you think, you see.'

'Oh ah! but does He clap them in prison if they don't mind the law?' cried Robin, disbelievingly.

'He will punish them somehow, so the Bible says.'

'I'd like to see Him do it! I don't believe that, Mr. Gower.'

'Well, I am not quite sure whether I do myself, so we will say no more about it. If you want to know all that sort of thing, you must go to someone else—Mr. Lyon.'

Robin's face darkened. 'Anyhow, it was Mr. Lyon as first told me anything about God,' he said, musingly, after a pause. 'I believe he knows a lot about Him. I s'pose he's one of them God's good to.'

'Well, this is not telling me your history. How came you to be so fond of drink?'

'I always was fond of it, I believe: leastways, I can't mind a time when I wasn't. When I was a tiny chap, I used

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to go to the publics 'long with big Bill, and sing songs for the men, and then they'd give me drops of gin. Sometimes they'd give me a lot to make me drunk, just for the fun of seeing me caper about like a little fool.'

'I have never seen you the worse for drink, Robin; how is it?'

The boy coloured. 'I haven't had not very much this long time; not since I've been here,' he answered, evasively.

'Don't you care for it so much?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Then why don't you have it? Come, out with it, and speak the truth.'

'I've been so 'fraid we'd both get too much, and then—and then——' faltered the boy.

'And then it would be a case of the prison again, I suppose. Is that what you mean?'

'Yes, sir,' said Robin, hanging his head.

'So you keep sober to watch over my inebriated footsteps!'

'Well, sir, you can't always get along quite by yourself. You are not angry with me, are you, sir?'

Gower looked unbelievingly at the wistful eyes; but gradually his incredulity faded away, and he turned away with a sigh.

'You are a good, faithful little fellow, Robin. I don't understand it.'

'Then you are not angry with me, sir?'

'No, of course not.'

The shadow left the boy's face, and seeing that Gower had sunk into a reverie he pulled a paper out of his pocket and began to read, every now and then glancing up in readiness to obey a word or sign. In the presence of this, his chosen master, his nature seemed to change. No longer defiant, reckless, insolent, he watched the changing expressions of his face, and knew when to be silent and when to speak.

But the interest of his paper presently absorbed all his attention, and he did not know that he in turn was being watched. Lifting his eyes Gower saw the light of excitement in his face, and wondered what he was reading. He saw him suddenly clench his hand as if eager for the fray, and heard him draw a short, quick breath of suspense.

'What have you got there?' he asked, his curiosity excited.

'Such a jolly tale! It's coming out in chapters; and this is splendid! Would you like to look at it?'

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He handed him the paper, which was profusely illustrated, and Gower took it carelessly. The moment his eye fell upon the title he started slightly.

'Do you take it every week?' he asked, turning his face away from the boy's sharp eyes.

'I should think so! You jest read that chapter, Mr. Gower,' said Robin, enthusiastically.

There was no need for him to read it; he knew its contents too well. Still he glanced his eye down the column, not willing that the boy should suspect the truth. For the first time he felt ashamed of his work, and inclined to throw it in the fire. It was not so bad as many of its class; he knew that; but it was full of thrilling adventures carried on at the expense of a tolerable amount of bloodshed. There was the usual bold hero, pictured in glowing colours; the heroine, boasting every charm under the sun; the unscrupulous rival; the midnight attack and capture of the heroine; the various adventures of her lover, who, distracted with grief, performs prodigies of valour. A fascinating enough tale to such a boy as Winter, who venerated 'pluck' and revelled in exciting adventure, but despicable in Gower's eyes, now that he saw it in the light of a calmer reason.

He despised himself as he read the worse than rubbish, and at the moment wondered how he could ever have written it. There were times when he was an enigma to himself, when nothing puzzled him so much as his own deeds.

'I must have been mad,' he thought, contemptuously. 'None but a madman would have written such stuff!'

He threw the paper back to Robin, who looked disappointed.

'Won't you read it, sir?'

'No; he was a bad man who wrote that tale, Robin.'

There was something in his tone which attracted the boy's attention. He knew that Gower wrote, but curiously enough had the idea that he wrote only on political or scientific subjects. He knew that he was a man of considerable genius, clever and brilliant, and always in his thoughts he associated him with leaders in daily papers, or with the first-class magazines. Gower had once told him that he had written certain articles, and the boy in his ignorance had assumed that he could not descend in the ranks of literature. Therefore he only deduced part of the truth from his manner now.

'Did you know the man who wrote it?' he asked, with interest.

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'Yes, I did,' said Gower, shortly. 'He was a bad man, I tel you, though I think sometimes he was more fool than knave.'

'Why?'

'Because he treated himself worse than he treated anybody else; that's why. He ruined himself, and though he brought trouble upon those who loved him, their trouble was nothing in comparison with his. It would have been better for him if he had died when he was a boy than live for shame, and disgrace, and scorn.'

'I wonder if it would be better for me if I was to die now I'm a boy,' said Robin, dreamily. 'I sometimes wish I had never been born; there ain't much fun in living, any way. If you ain't shoved one way you are another; there don't seem to be no room anywheres for a little chap like me—except in prison,' he added, bitterly; 'there's plenty of room there. It must cost a lot of money to build such great places, Mr. Gower; where do they get the money from?'

'Out of the nation's pocket! Why, of course there's room for you there,' said Gower, mockingly; 'they are built on purpose for you and such as you, lad! didn't you know that? You ought to go down on your knees and thank the nation for providing such a nice, comfortable home for you! where's your gratitude?'

'I hate the nation!' exclaimed the boy, his eyes gleaming with anger, and his chest heaving. 'I hate their old prisons! What right have they to shut me up there? I ain't their property! I belong to myself!'

Gower leaned back in his chair and laughed, a low, mocking, sarcastic laugh, which drove Robin wild.

'What are you laughing at?' he cried, passionately. 'I do hate them, every one of them! Why shouldn't I? They've never done nothing for me! I wish I could build a prison big enough to put the nation in, and shut them all up! I'd never let them out, never!'

Still Gower laughed, and the boy grew frantic with rage.

'It's all very well for you to laugh! You are a man, and if they was to take you up, I daresay you've got friends to get you off if you'd ask them; but if I was took up, there 'ud be nobody to speak up for me! I should have to go to prison, 'cause I'm a little chap with no friends! They'd say it was the best place for me! I know; I've heard 'em, and I hate them! I hate them! I hate them!'

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He stamped on the ground in his rage, wrought up to a pitch of intense excitement, not only by the recollection of his wrongs, but by Gower's contemptuous laugh.

Turning round, he was about to fly out of the room, when Gower stretched out his long arm and drew him to his side.

'Poor little ill-used Robin! did you think I was laughing at you? Not I! I laughed at the grand defiance you hurled at the nation, and I laughed at the nation itself. May I not laugh at the nation, Robin?'

The boy ceased his struggles and stood still, but Gower felt him quiver with suppressed emotion.

'I am not over fond of some of the representatives of the nation myself; they are arrant humbugs, Robin, some of them. Never mind them; they can't hurt you, lad, if you take care. Come, look up, and tell me if you include me in that sweeping execration.'

'You know I don't, sir,' said Robin, humbly, ashamed of his outburst of temper. 'But I can't bide to hear you laugh like that. I'd rather you'd knock me down.'

'I will not do it again; will that satisfy you? It is nearly twelve o'clock; time you were asleep. Off to bed with you, and forget all your troubles.'

'It's no use; they'll come again in the morning,' muttered the boy, as he obeyed. He threw himself down on the little mattress in the corner, and drew the rug over his head. In a short time Gower followed his example. It was about four o'clock when a sudden scream from the opposite corner awoke him, and he sprang up in alarm.

'I can't get out! Oh! I can't get out!' cried Robin, wildly. 'Let me out, I say! let me out!'

He was sitting up, fighting with some unseen foe, and Gower shook him vigorously.

'What is the matter, Robin? Wake up, child, wake up.'

With a frightened cry the boy caught hold of his hand. 'Oh, Mr. Gower, is that you? I thought I was shut up in the dark cell and couldn't get out!'

'You were dreaming, you silly boy. What do you know about the dark cell? Don't be frightened: I am with you. You are all right.'

But dream though it was, it had been so vivid and real that he shook from head to foot with intense fear.

'I saw the light,' he gasped, 'and then they shut the door

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and left me alone in the blackness! the awful blackness! Was it a dream?'

'Nightmare, I should say,' replied Gower, lightly. 'You had too much supper. You are not frightened now, are you? I will strike a light, and we will soon see whether we are in a dark cell or not.'

'No, no! I'm not frightened now, sir,' said Robin, eagerly, holding his hand tightly. 'Never mind about the light: I'm all right now, I can feel you.'

His tone was so trustful, so loving, that Gower was strangely touched. Taking him in his arms, he carried him to his own bed and put him down.

'There,' he said, stretching himself beside him: 'if we have any more of the dark cell we will be in it together, if you please.'

He threw one arm over him, and in a short time the boy's regular breathing told that he was asleep.

But there was no more sleep that night for Gower. He lay, wearily counting the quarters as they struck, and longing for the daylight. The past conversation had supplied him with food for thought, and he wondered why Robin cared so much for him. The fact that he voluntarily went without the drink that he loved in order that he might be able to watch over his safety had touched him deeply. What had he done for this little stray that he should deny himself for his sake? Nothing; he had but suffered him to share his room; that was not much; and he paid him for it by running his errands and waiting upon him. If it came to a question of obligation, he was not sure that the debt was not on his side.

'Poor little fellow,' he thought, 'I wish I could do something for him; but I suppose he wouldn't thank me to take him out of the streets; he's a thorough little gipsy. Perhaps he is right, and it would be a good thing for him if he were to die. There is little enough to be got out of life at its best, and he is more likely to share its worst than its best.'

Then his thoughts flew off at a tangent to his own life, and when Robin awoke the next morning, he found him in one of the brooding melancholy moods which he had learned by experience to dread and hate.

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CHAPTER XXI.

DEEP DOWN—YET GOD'S CHILD.

THE reading-room was finished and opened, and proved a strong counter-attraction to those who had hitherto sought company and amusement in the public-houses. There were books of different sorts—histories, biographies, travels, and plenty of attractive fiction. To this latter there had been some objection on the part of one or two gentlemen, who, hearing of the work, had offered their assistance. They did not consider fiction wholesome literature, and would have condemned it altogether if left to themselves. But fortunately Lyon and Mr. Chester were strong enough to hold their own. Experience had taught the former the immense educational value of what is popularly known as fiction, and Mr. Chester having little experimental knowledge himself of its effect upon the lowest classes, wisely followed the lead of those who had. Therefore, there was abundance of pure, good-toned, interesting story-books which, until the intellectual standard of the readers was raised, drew more to the room than any other class of literature. This was a very great annoyance to Mr. Langford, whose own taste was strictly classical and scientific, and with whom Lyon had one or two controversies.

Going in one evening he found him holding forth eloquently to a tired-looking man upon the merits of a work on logic; a book useful enough in its way, but useless here, because not wanted. The man listened, but looked bored, and Lyon went up to them to hear what was going on.

'He wants "Robinson Crusoe," Mr. Lyon,' said Langford, in an expostulating tone. 'A great fellow like that. I tell him it's only for boys, and I am trying to persuade him to read this, which is far more suitable.'

'What makes you want to read "Robinson Crusoe," Jim?' asked Lyon, pleasantly.

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'Well, sir, my boy, he's read it, and he's ben a-telling of it to us at home. I don't rec'lect if that's the right name. It's about a man as was shipwreck on an island, and built a house all by himself, and lived by himself, with never a soul, except a black nigger, to say, "How-d'ye-do" to. Mr. Langford says it's "Robinson Crusoe."'

'Yes, that's "Robinson Crusoe," and a fine book it is too! Where is it?'

It was on a top shelf, and he mounted the steps himself and brought it down. The man looked pleased and gratified; it could not be such a very out-of-the-way book for a man to read if Mr. Lyon spoke so highly of it.

'Come, Mr. Langford, don't be discouraged if you can't make scholars of them all at once,' said Lyon, following the librarian to his table.

'But "Robinson Crusoe" for a man like that!' exclaimed Mr. Langford.

'Why not? I read it not a year ago. Let them have whatever they like. What is it a man wants after he has been working hard all day?'

'Rest and recreation.'

'For the body only?'

'It was not an abstruse work,' said Mr. Langford, hastily.

'Not to you; it was to him. Their minds need recreation as well as their bodies. Let one thing lead to another: that very man will probably ask for a higher class of book when his mind has been trained by reading. He will not always be satisfied with works of fiction.'

Langford argued the question for some time, but finally gave way, and the men got the books they wanted without comment.

The opening of board schools in the neighbourhood brought some to the reading-room; not understanding this novel proceeding on the part of the Government they came to read the newspaper reports and argue the subject with their companions. As might have been expected, there was much diversity of opinion; some angrily charging Government with interfering and meddling with the Englishman's right of liberty, and others cordially approving an act which took the responsibility of their children's education entirely off their shoulders. Of course the debating society took up the question, and it was warmly and angrily discussed.

Mr. Chester, as one of the most zealous promoters of edu-

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cation of the day, was nominated and elected one of the members of the School Board, and entered heart and soul into his new duties. With Lyon as a guide, he visited numbers of the grumblers and argued and reasoned and explained so good-humouredly, that many were convinced even of the benefit of compulsion which had been presented to them as an unwarrantable piece of tyranny on the part of the Government. It was in these rounds that he found out the almost unbounded influence Lyon had gained over the men, women, and children with whom he so constantly mingled. He was always welcome, always gladly received, even in places miles distant from his own home.

'How do you possibly find time to get over so much ground, and keep up such an enormous circle of acquaintance?' he asked.

'Many of them keep me up,' replied Lyon, smiling. 'You forget the number of classes and meetings I have to do with: these people come to them, many of them, and I see them there, but I do not often visit them in their own homes. I have their names and circumstances down in a book, and a glance over it now and then refreshes my memory; but I do not often forget them. Besides, I have my agents, helpers, or whatever you like to call them, in all directions.'

'Who are they?' asked Mr. Chester, whose interest in this home heathendom was daily increasing. 'I thought you worked single-handed.'

'If I did it would prove all my past work to be a failure. Every successful effort on my part has raised up another worker, and I judge of what I have done by the extent of the co-operation given. Here is an example.' They were passing a window across which a curtain was only partially drawn, and he stopped and motioned Mr. Chester to look in. A number of little girls were sitting round a table, each with needle and cotton and thimble, busily at work on what looked, in some cases, like pieces of rag.

'A sewing class?'

'Yes; that young woman at the head of the table teaches them to mend their own clothes, or make fresh ones, as the case may be. She is one of my helpers.'

A cheery voice inside the room started a pretty lively children's hymn, in which the little workers joined heartily, and after listening a minute the two men walked on,

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'I suppose there is a story there.'

'One I could repeat with slight variation in many cases. Sarah, when I first knew her, was an honest, dogged, sullen girl, working hard for a living, and wrapped up in a sort of selfish misanthropy; her favourite saying was, "I care for nobody, and nobody cares for me." She belonged to a class more numerous than I had then any idea of.'

'Well?' said Mr. Chester, as he paused.

'Well, it was only necessary to convince her that someone did care for her, and all the better feelings of her nature were roused. You have seen the result.'

'You have to bring different influences to bear upon different natures. It requires no little knowledge and tact. I suppose that is how it is so many well-intentioned people fail in their efforts to reform and do good.'

'They do not know what weapons to use, nor how to use them,' said Lyon. 'If there be one thing more than another that tries my patience, it is to see the tactless, awkward way in which some men go to work when they honestly wish to do right. There was one the other night, trying to bring God before a poor, ignorant, dying girl's half-roused consciousness. He told her that if she did not repent and cry for mercy, she would be lost for ever, she would sink into an eternity of awful torture, there to writhe through the countless ages, never to be released! What was the man thinking of!'

There was a ring of passionate indignation in his voice which startled Mr. Chester, accustomed as he was to his usual calm self-possession.

'I sometimes wonder the world is as good as it is,' continued Lyon. 'There has been a great hue and cry throughout Christendom against those disciples who drove back the children, but nothing is said about the men who hold God up to a sorrowful sin-laden world as a pitiless, relentless Ruler, dealing out threats and denunciations, and wielding His right of judgment with an iron hand! Who would dare to approach such a God? and yet they call themselves His ministers, His representatives.'

'But the terrors of the law must be spoken of to some; mild measures have no effect,' said Mr. Chester, recalling the exceedingly mild discourses which fell from a certain pulpit Sunday after Sunday upon an indifferent sleepy congregation. 'Men want rousing.'

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'The terrors of the law have had full swing long enough; they have been the Church's most useful and well-worn weapon, and the result is only too obvious. It is time other means were tried. I wonder what God thinks of it all.'

'I wonder what He *cares*,' said a voice from a dark archway. It was a woman's voice, bitter and hard, and they could see the dim outline of her form as she leaned against the wall.

'What do you want?' asked Lyon, stopping abruptly.

'Everything, and I've got nothing, and much God cares!' was the defiant answer.

'Have you shelter for the night?'

'No.'

'Have you food?'

'No.'

'Then God cares so much that He has sent me to give you both,' said Lyon, in his peculiarly firm and decisive tone. 'Are you willing to take what I can give?'

'Am I willing to die of starvation and cold?' retorted the woman, still cowering in her shelter. 'I'm willing to take the worst you can give; it's that or starve.'

'Then go to that house with the lamp, and give them this ticket,' he said, taking a red ticket from his pocket-book. She crept out, and snatching it from his hand, without a word of thanks, walked off. They watched her till the door of the house opened and let her in, and then walked on.

'A free lodging-house?' said Mr. Chester, questioningly.

'One kept by a number of women who were once such as that poor creature. They keep me supplied with red tickets, and I am at liberty to send one lodger there every night.'

'But who instituted it? Who set it going?'

'They did, themselves. There are four of them, and they work hard for a living, but they can always spare something for those worse off than themselves. They have two beds which they call the "Lord's beds," and these are for the exclusive use of the homeless, wandering women. They will take that poor creature and comfort her up among them, give her a good supper and a comfortable bed, and excite every good feeling she may have left.'

'And then turn her adrift?'

'No; they have friends in a different class; ladies, who are ready to help and employ any case they recommend.'

'Do you work by any system, Lyon? Yours seems such

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an odd, unsystematic way of doing things. Where are your committees, and managers, and secretaries? all the etc., which seem to us indispensable to any large work of charity?'

'So they are indispensable when the work is a public one, and where public money is used. I have a system, and I find it works well.'

'May I ask what it is?'

'When I find a man or woman anxious to do good, and willing to share their money with those who need, I make a point of showing them how to do it themselves, and do not take the money and the responsibility out of their own hands. If I did that, I should need committees, and statements of accounts, and all that bother. My theory is, every man his own almoner. I believe one of the greatest evils of the day, one of the greatest hindrances to the spread of Christianity, is the growing propensity on the part of the majority of professed Christians to throw the burden of work on the shoulders of a select few. They think that they are entirely released from all obligation to work themselves if they pay a certain sum annually to some charitable fund or society. A few tons of coals and sacks of potatoes at Christmas time absolve their elastic consciences from all the selfish indifference of the past year. A cheque for ten, fifty, or a hundred pounds, like charity, covers the multitude of sins.'

'Are you not rather hard upon them? All people are not possessed of your strength of will, remember; it is no light thing to do as you do.'

'I do not speak of doing as I do; it is not everyone's work to visit the class I visit. But I believe there are very few people in the world—the Christian world—who cannot find some work if they wish for it. Now, look at that poor seamstress; who would have thought she could find such a mission? and yet her sewing-class is quietly doing its work, and influencing those children for good. She talks to them, and sings with them, and the girls are innocently happy, and so the stone is set rolling. Look at those four women; they have only started their lodging-house within this last year, and already twelve poor women, through their influence, are working honestly for their living. If the world is ever Christianized, it will be by means of a roused and active Church, not by a favoured few. What right has the Church to sit with folded hands, entrusting its most sacred duty to the hired missionary

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and solitary, voluntary worker? If the Bible means anything at all, it means universal work, and no amount of casuistry can shift the burden from one shoulder to another.'

Mr. Chester shrugged his shoulders. 'Yours will never be a popular doctrine, Lyon; the *dolce far niente* is too much the fashion. Mind you, I believe you are right; but it is wonderful how few workers there are, compared with the drones, the Christmas-coals men! I wonder what the result would be if every individual Christian were to awake to a sense of responsibility, and resolve for one year to do everything in his power to sweep away the world's misery and sin.'

'The millennium, perhaps,' replied Lyon, with a smile. 'When recognised acknowledged responsibility is the fashion, Satan may tremble for his dominion.'

They were passing a public-house, and he suddenly stopped, his quick ear detecting a voice he knew among a Babel of sounds within. It was a boy's voice rising high and clear in the refrain of a well-known song; a voice as sweet and pure in tone as that of any white-robed chorister chanting his Magnificat in the dim light of a stately cathedral.

'What is it?' asked Mr. Chester.

'Will you wait for me?—I am going in here for a minute,' said Lyon, his hand on the door. Mr. Chester looked astonished.

'Is it safe?' he said, dubiously; it was such a very disreputable-looking place.

'I shall be safe, and you too, if you choose to come.'

'Then I will come.'

They pushed open the door and went in, Lyon speaking to one of the men as he passed. At the upper end of the room, leaning against the table, stood Willie Winter, his face flushed and his eyes brilliant with the light of excitement. He had just finished the song, and was drinking eagerly the fiery draught of gin which they gave him as its price, while they wound up with a chorus, regardless of time or tune.

There was some sort of a dispute going on between two of the men, each contending that it was his turn to pay for the song. In the midst of it the boy interfered imperiously.

'You shall both pay, and I'll drink double.'

There was a shout of applause and laughter as the double quantity of gin was called for and brought. Already the boy had drunk until his articulation was growing thick, and his

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hands shook with stimulated excitement; but they only laughed the more and urged him on.

With a face so dark and set and stern, that Mr. Chester started nervously, Lyon strode across the room and took the boy in his iron grasp. Lifting him on the table, despite his furious resistance, he looked round upon the men, his lip quivering with uncontrollable wrath and indignation.

They knew him, most of them, and those who did not were cowed by his evident power over the others. Even the most hardened and defiant dropped their eyes before his steady gaze, and the loudest voice sank into silence.

'Is there a lack of foul fiends that the devil must employ *you* to do his work?' he said, his voice low with repressed anger, yet full of a sadness which few there could understand. 'Is not the boy going to ruin fast enough without a helping hand from *you*—*you* who have children of your own! Look at him.'

They raised their eyes and looked; they saw the boy, beautiful enough to be pictured as the impersonation of boyish grace, but shadowed by a curse, and standing in the darkness of a conscious degradation, and a faint gleam of shame appeared on the faces of some.

'The little beggar likes it,' muttered one.

'*Likes it!* and you like to give it him—to hear him curse and swear, and steep his lips in blasphemy and sin! Shame on you for the disgrace to your manhood!'

They began to see something of it, poor blind sots—something of the shamefulness of the deed they had done; but it was only a vague, uncomfortable consciousness, born of the lingering remnant of manhood to which Lyon had appealed; they scarcely knew why their eyes drooped beneath his righteous indignation.

'He won't sing without he has drink,' said one, apologetically.

'And you buy his God-given voice with that cursed stuff!'

He loosened his hold on the boy, who immediately sprang across the table. A glass of gin and water, untouched, was standing before one of the men, who had put it down on Lyon's sudden appearance. Quick as lightning he stooped and seized it, and with a look of vindictive triumph drained it to the very last drop. For one moment he stood upright, and then reeled; one of the men caught him, and Lyon came round and took him in his arms.

'Do you know where he lives?' he asked.

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They looked at one another, but shook their heads; they had seen very little of him of late.

'I'll take him home with me if you like, sir,' said one of them rising, with a half-ashamed look on his face.

Lyon shook his head. 'No, thank you, Gay; I will see to him myself.'

As he spoke the boy suddenly turned his head, and seized his hand with his teeth. He had not strength enough to bite very hard, but he drew the blood.

Laying him down on the table, Lyon coolly wrapped his handkerchief round the wound, and then took him up again and went out.

'What are you going to do with the little rascal?' asked Mr. Chester, who had been watching the scene with amazement and interest.

'Take him home for the present.'

'Has he hurt you much? Is not the bite of an intoxicated person sometimes dangerous?'

'So it is said.'

'Inhuman little animal! Do you know him?'

'Oh yes; we are old acquaintances, Winter and I,' replied Lyon, glancing down at the face on his arm, and wondering if the boy were conscious of the conversation. 'But we are not friends.'

'That is equivalent to a certificate of total depravity.'

'For him or me?' asked Lyon, smiling.

'Nonsense! If after a long acquaintance you are not friends, there must be something radically wrong in the boy. He is a nice-looking little fellow, too.'

'Too fine a piece of workmanship to be ruined like this.'

'Well, he is young, and he is in good hands now. There is hope for him.'

'He may be in good hands, but not the right hands. I have failed too long and too often to hope much from myself.'

'Is he so thoroughly hardened that nothing can touch him?'

It was evident that the boy was totally unconscious, and Lyon stopped to move him into a more easy position.

'I do not say that nothing can touch him,' he replied. 'I only say *I* cannot. I believe another influence might.'

He was thinking of the child Sybil, and the boy's strange metamorphosis in the wood-shed.

'He has taken a violent dislike to me,' he continued. 'I do

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not know why. Most probably he thinks I have injured him in some way. I prevented his receiving money one day from a lady whom he was deceiving with an elaborate story of imaginary want; but that was only a trifle, and he hated me before. I do not understand it.'

'How does he live?'

'Anyhow; his face is a fortune in the streets.'

'I should say his voice was his fortune if I had not just witnessed the use he puts it to. What will his manhood be?'

'God only knows,' said Lyon, with a shade of sadness in his tone. 'It may be a very grand and noble thing yet. I hope it may; he is so young: only eleven.'

'It would be a prize worth wresting from the enemy, Lyon. I wonder if I should have any influence over him. I am a stranger, and he can have no possible prejudice against me,' said Mr. Chester, all his humanity rising against the picture of the boy's possibly wrecked and ruined future. 'Would he take regular employment if it were offered him? Or would he consent to go to school, do you think?'

'I'm afraid not, unless you gained an influence over him first. He is too wedded to the freedom of his Arab life. The only one who has any influence over him at present, so far as I can find out, is a little child. Still, you can do no harm by trying. The thing is, how are you to get at him? He will be off to-morrow morning, unless he is wondrously changed. Will you come in?'

They were at Lyon's door, and in answer to Mr. Chester's knock, a big, clumsy-looking young woman came forward with a light.

'Well, Sarah, where is Mother Willett?' said Lyon, in a kindly, protecting tone, which seemed comically out of place. 'Go and tell her I want her.'

'Where is the black-eyed little Ellen?' asked Mr. Chester as they went upstairs.

'In a better and safer place than this. I sent her away as soon as I possibly could. She has been received into a home for little girls.'

'One of your self-instituted agencies?'

'Yes,' replied Lyon, laying his burden down upon the couch. 'Poor Sarah, whom you saw downstairs, is "touched," as the saying is; she is simple as a child, but very strong and helpful, and devotedly attached to Mother Willett. Now, I suppose I

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must not put my poor little black sheep among the boys; there is no knowing what he will be up to. I must get Mother to make him up a bed in my own room.'

He stood by the unconscious boy, looking down upon him with pitying eyes. He was so young, so pitiably young, to be lying there, dead to every sense of shame, hardened to sin by a terrible experience, every trace of childhood's rightful purity and innocence driven out of him by long familiarity with all that lowers and degrades. Without, fair enough to attract the admiring gaze of a beauty-loving world; within, a sight over which angels might weep, and devils laugh and triumph.

And yet so young! only eleven years old, and his hand against every man; only a mere child, yet a neglected, isolated wanderer. There was no hand to guard and guide, to sow the seeds of grand and glorious truths, to lead into the light of unsullied honour. Sin and shame dogged his footsteps, evil spirits were his only counsellors, the prison and a felon's grave his future! Unless! Unless what?

'Father, he is one of Thy sons! let it be mine to restore to him his birthright!'

The prayer went up over the sleeping child, and was registered in heaven. The *unless* was found.

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CHAPTER XXII.

AMONG THE BURGLARS.

ON waking the next morning, Lyon's first thought was for the boy; who, however, was still sleeping a heavy unrefreshing sleep. Not caring to awake him, he left him as he was, and went out, leaving word that he was to be allowed to do as he liked.

'Let him go if he wishes to,' he said to Mother Willett. 'Give him some breakfast, and leave him alone. I will come home at noon.'

He did not at all expect to see him when he went back; but he was still asleep. As he stooped over him to cover one hot little hand, he opened his eyes and looked up. For some moments he gazed in silence, and then moved his head uneasily, evidently not knowing where he was.

'I am going to have my dinner,' said Lyon, patting his head. 'Jump up and have some with me.'

He raised himself and looked round. 'What place is this?' he asked, suspiciously.

'This is my room; you didn't know you were spending the night with me, did you? Lie still a bit and you will feel better.'

Unable to resist, he fell back, sick and dizzy, and closed his eyes. Presently he felt something cool on his forehead, and saw Lyon sitting beside him with a basin and a sponge. Too dazed and weak to offer opposition he lay still, trying to recall the circumstances which had brought him there. After a little while he felt better, but could not dress without Lyon's aid, which he accepted in sullen silence. When he tried to walk his head swam, and he would have fallen if Lyon had not caught him. Taking him in his arms, he carried him into the next room and laid him on the couch by the fire.

Dinner was brought up, but Winter could touch nothing but a little toast. Mother Willett made him a cup of tea, and as it

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was hot and sweet he drank it. Lyon took little notice of him till dinner was over; he saw that he was confused and ill at ease.

It was raining fast outside, and a fog was gathering, making the brightness of the room more apparent. It was a new experience to the little outcast, and he gazed round with curious eyes.

'It is better in than out, Willie,' said Lyon, drawing his chair forward, and giving the fire a friendly poke. 'We are in for a regular London fog, and we know what that means, don't we?'

A slight nod was the only reply vouchsafed, as the boy turned his head and glanced out of the window.

'I have not seen you for a long time. Where are you living now?' continued Lyon, determined to win him to speech if possible.

'A long way off.'

'Why have you deserted your little friend? Sybil tells me she never sees you now.'

A strange, inexplicable expression flitted across the boy's face, which, if the idea had not been too preposterous, Lyon would have interpreted as dislike, with a dash of contempt. Not that the dislike was preposterous—he had had too ample proof of its existence—but he had no knowledge of the chain of accusations the boy was weaving against him, ending with what he took to be a piece of hypocrisy, deserving only of the utmost contempt. What did Mr. Lyon mean by speaking of his desertion of Sybil, when he himself had robbed him of her childish love? His pale cheek flushed with indignation at the thought, and his compressed lips took a firmer curve.

Accustomed as Lyon was to read the faces of those around him, and especially of his boys, he failed entirely now; but this much he did read—that the boy's feeling toward him was one of bitter enmity. Unable to account for it, he bent forward and gazed searchingly into the proud, handsome little face.

'Why do you dislike me?' he asked, quietly; but the only reply was a defiant look from the large, dark eyes.

'What have I done that you should treat me as if I were an enemy? Do you not know friends from foes, my boy?'

Still the same obstinate silence.

'There is only one thing I can recall, and that is my appearance in Piccadilly that morning when someone was about to

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give you charity. Surely that is not what you so bitterly resent?'

If it were, or were not, he could not tell from the set face which seemed to grow harder as he watched it.

'You are too young to wander this great city alone and uncared for, Willie,' he continued, patiently, the kindness of his tone never varying. 'Come to me and learn what it is to be loved and trusted. Do you know what I can see in your face?'

A swift questioning glance told him that some interest was roused.

'Here,' he said, pushing back the thick curls which shaded the boy's forehead, 'I see a quick, clever intelligence, a ready wit, and active brain, but you make some mistakes, my boy. Here I see great strength of will, which may prove either a blessing or a curse, according to the training you give it. Here are curves of the mouth which tell me that you can be a faithful, loving friend, a trusty little follower: I like to see that. Have I read it aright?'

There was the faintest possible relaxation of the curves, which gave a gratified answer. The boy prided himself upon his faithfulness to a friend, and deemed treachery a sin of deepest dye. But though the words pleased him he distrusted them, and Lyon read the distrust in his eyes.

'You have qualities which few boys possess, and if you will, may have a rich and happy future. Which would you rather do, grow up as you are now, ignorant and idle, to pick up a living as best you may in the streets, or learn to be a clever, intelligent man, and make a home and a name for yourself? Just think for one minute; recall the men you know—many of them vagrants and wanderers, and some worse. Would you like your manhood to be like theirs? Would you like to look forward to years of such a life as theirs? Think of their miserable homes, their constant toil, their wretchedness and want; you know it all, you have seen it often enough. Now look on the other side. See yourself in a position of trust, with money in your pocket, for which you have worked honestly, good clothes to wear, a happy, comfortable home, and a character no man need be ashamed of. Honest, honourable, respected; no fear of the police then, Willie.'

The boy winced; a somewhat painful chord was touched, for he was very much afraid of the police.

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Lyon paused for an answer, but none came.

'Is not the last picture the better of the two?'

'Yes.'

'Then shall we try to make it yours?'

'I get on very well as I am.'

'What are you doing for a living now?'

'Nothink pertic'lar.' As the boy spoke, his eye fell upon Lyon's hand, and he changed colour, a dim recollection of the past night coming over him.

'Would you not like to be in regular employment? I saw a gentleman last night who was willing to take you into his office and give you every chance of getting on in the world. What shall I say to him?'

'I don't want you to say anythink.'

Lyon sighed; it seemed useless to talk to and urge this little stoic, who listened without any apparent interest, and scarcely deigned to answer. It was time for him to go, and he rose with a sense of defeat. Winter watched him indifferently; saw him go out of the room, and then slowly got off the couch, but hearing his returning footstep lay back again.

'Here are some books for you to look at,' said Lyon, drawing a chair to the side of the couch. 'I will put them here, and then you need not move. Will you stay here till I come home?'

'I shan't promise.'

'Very well; do just as you like. Mother Willett will bring you some tea presently, and then if you wish to go, do so, but I would rather you stayed; and, besides, I am not sure that you are fit to go out this wretched day. If you will stay till I come back I will promise to see you safely to your home, wherever that may be now.'

Willie started in dismay. See him home and find Mr. Gower! No, indeed!

Lyon stood watching him for one minute, then stooped and kissed his forehead and went out.

Long after the sound of his firm footsteps had died away, the boy lay motionless, gazing into the glowing fire. Curious thoughts were crowding up in the busy brain; strange feelings were at work in the heavy heart. It was the first time that he ever remembered being kissed, save by the child Sybil; the first time for many long years that any lips had touched his face. And the touch seemed to linger; he raised his hand, almost as

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if expecting to feel it there, and a great lump rose in his throat, and a mist gathered before his eyes.

It was very babyish he knew—awfully babyish and silly—but he could not help it, the tears would come. What magic was there in that kiss to bring about him such a flood of sorrowful thoughts? Why did the world seem so cold and wide and dreary? Was it not the same as ever? He could not answer his own unconscious questionings. He only knew that his heart was aching, and that a sudden sense of desolation had fallen upon him; he only felt that he was a homeless wanderer in a land of happy homes, an alien from love, and all that makes life beautiful and lovely! He scarcely knew what made the hot and bitter tears come welling up, blinding his sight and making him bury his head in the cushion, nor what gave him that choking sensation which made that one sharp, stifled sob so great a relief. It was enough for him that he was wretched, and lonely, and desolate.

The books lay unheeded on the chair; he never gave them a thought. The fog grew denser, and the fire burned low in the grate, but he never raised his head. Presently Mother Willett came in with a dainty little tea on a tray.

'Well, my dear, have you had a nice rest?' she asked, cheerily. 'You are ready for something to eat, I'll be bound. Why, dear me! the fire's nearly out.'

She bustled about, putting on coal and stirring the dying embers into life, and then sat down beside him.

'I don't want any tea,' he muttered from the cushion.

'Oh yes you do. Look at this nice muffin; it's enough to tempt the Queen. You will be ill if you don't eat.'

He felt faint and sinking then, and knew by experience the cause. Rising, he obediently ate and drank, but refused to speak. Poor Mrs. Willett grew quite discouraged. She had never had to deal with such a boy before.

But while she chatted, vainly trying to win a response, he was busy thinking.

'What time does *he* come home?' he asked, suddenly.

'Different times; he'll be early to-night, I expect. It isn't often he has visitors, but when he has he makes them want to come again. Are you coming to stay with him?'

'No.'

The brief monosyllable somewhat disconcerted the kind old woman. 'Our boys have fine times,' she went on briskly.

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'Bless you, we are as merry as crickets together. And fine scholars they're getting, too, some of them.'

'Who?'

'Well, there's Dick; he can read and write like a grown man, almost. And Sam, he's a fine boy at his books. You go to school, don't you?'

'Sometimes.'

'Mr. John helps our boys, and they'd learn anything to please him.'

'Who's Mr. John?'

'Mr. Lyon, I mean. I've promised Dick and Sam some toffy to-night: will you come and help us make it?'

He hesitated. It was a tempting offer; the warm, cosy room, the fun with the boys, the comfortable bed afterwards, if he chose to stay. But he *dared not* stay; the risk was too great. He must hurry off before Mr. Lyon came home, or else all would be found out—his friendship with Mr. Gower, and how that friendship had been won. They would know that he had never given that note to Mr. Lyon, that he had deceived and misled one whom he called his friend, and they would despise and hate him.

He could not bear it! The very thought drove him wild and he could scarcely keep still in his impatience to be off. Would she never leave off talking and go away, this kind old woman who recalled to him the memory of one now dead? Was she going to keep watch over him till Mr. Lyon came back? His heart sank with despair, and his head dropped upon the cushion.

'There, you feel better now, don't you, my dear? I'll make a nice blaze for you, and then I must go downstairs for a bit; but I'll soon come back.'

Breathless with suspense, he waited till the slow step had descended the staircase, and then with trembling limbs rose from the couch. He could scarcely stand at first; the room seemed to go round and round before his dizzy eyes. Holding on to the back of a chair, he stood perfectly still, with strange bewildering noises sounding in his ears. What did it all mean? Was he going to die? No, no! not that! He could not die; he dared not die! and with a frightened sob he strove to walk. He got across the room, down the stairs, into the street, and was lost in the blinding fog. Which was the way? It did not much matter; either way would take him farther from

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Mr. Lyon; farther from him whose kiss was still lingering on his forehead. On he went, stumbling and tripping like one in a dream, while the fog filled his eyes, and went down his throat as if it would suffocate him.

He had never felt like this before; never in all his life. He knew what it was to feel the gnawings of hunger, and he was only too well acquainted with the heavy headaches succeeding a night of dissipation, but they were nothing like this. Had he not better stop a bit, and try to think? What was the use of driving on deeper and deeper into the fog? It was growing thicker every minute; it would be solid soon, and hurl him back when he strove to advance. Had he not better go back?

No, no! Anywhere away from *him!* and he hurried on with panting breath, and trembling limbs, and failing eyes. What would Mr. Gower think? He would say he had deserted him. He must get back and tell him that he had been ill, that he had not deserted him. Perhaps someone would go and tell him just that one thing, and then it would not matter about the rest, about what became of him.

But there was no one to go; there was no one but himself in the streets. All those other strange moving objects were shadows; dim, unreal shadows. He touched one just now, and it glided away! They were all ghosts!

No one noticed him; men and women hurried on, only eager to get beyond the reach of the stifling fog. What to them was the little crouching figure, staring blindly before it with wide open eyes that saw all things as in a vision?

A little brother in the world's wide family? Nonsense! he is only a *gamin*, a gutter boy—one too many—whose place is nowhere! Leave him alone; he will find his level, and will be crushed out in the great struggle for life; the weaker must go to the wall.

Here was a crossing; now which way must he go? To the right? Yes, to the right; but how was he to get across the road? There were huge, shapeless monsters there, rushing on with headlong speed. They would crush him to death beneath their feet, and the fog would bury him out of sight! Then he must keep to the pavement. Never mind! it would lead him somewhere. Was that a wall? a giant wall, whose top loomed far above him? How was he to get over the wall? How stupid to build a great wall right across the pavement! How

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were people to get over it? Perhaps there was an opening somewhere. No! then he must lie down and wait—it didn't matter.

But wait for what? He did not know; he must *wait*—that was all. Perhaps someone would find him by-and-by; he would lie close to the wall. But suppose the wall were to fall! It would kill him!

In an overwhelming horror he staggered to his feet and reeled on, on! anywhere out of the reach of that dreadful wall! But there was no end to it! There it stretched in front of him, there it stretched behind him! With a faint cry, he threw up his arms and fell against a passer-by.

'Tell me how to get over it!'

'Get away, boy,' and a rough hand pushed him angrily back, and he fell at the foot of the wall, unseen, unheeded.

* * * * *

There were strange voices talking near him, and the strong, unpleasant fumes of tobacco floating round him, when he came to himself. Opening his eyes he found that he was in a low, dimly-lighted room, small, and ill-furnished. At a table before the fire sat three men, talking and smoking. He could see the faces of two of them; one he had never seen before, the other was familiar. For some time he lay pondering when and where he had seen it, but could not remember. They were talking in a low tone, but presently raised their voices, and he listened dreamily to the conversation, which, however, carried no meaning to his half-conscious brain.

'He's just the thing for us.'

'In size; but there's naught like one's own flesh and blood.'

'I tell you I promised to leave Sam alone.'

'More fool you! This one ain't much count for hard work.'

'There isn't a more wiry little chap going; he's had a fall or summut now. I've seen him often enough, and he's game to the back bone,' said the one whose face he could not see.

'But s'pose he won't come.'

A short laugh was the only answer vouchsafed.

'Well, it ain't much use unless they're willing.'

'He'll be willing enough! You leave him to me; I'll manage him.'

'Hush! he's stirring.'

Then it was of him they were talking. What did it all

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mean? The man whose face he knew came and bent over him.

'Holloa; you awake?'

'Yes; what are you saying about me?'

'Nothink; wot should we say about you? Think we've got nothink else to do than talk about such as you? Wot's the matter with you?'

'I don't know. He knocked me down, I think.'

'Well, lie still, and go on thinking.'

He went back to his seat, and the boy fell asleep. It was daylight when he awoke, and he was alone. He got off the bed and tried to walk, but only succeeded in falling to the ground. Presently the man who had spoken to him the previous night came in and lifted him back with no gentle hands.

'Wot do you want to go tumbling about like that for?' he said, angrily. 'If you can't walk, lie still.'

'But I want to go home! He'll wonder where I am.'

'Who? Mr. Lyon?' exclaimed the man, sharply.

The boy gazed at him; he remembered now; he knew where he had seen him. That dark night when he had walked so far to spite Mr. Lyon by giving a message from Mr. Gower. He came down the steps and Mr. Lyon came and looked after him.

'Who's him?' repeated the man.

'Mr. Smith.' It was on his tongue to say Mr. Gower, but he recollected in time.

'A very uncommon name! I don't know anyone as is lucky enough to bear it myself, but I'll make inquiries at Her Majesty's next drawing-room. He's one of the haristocracy, I s'pose?'

The tone, though joking, was conciliatory, and Winter smiled. It touched his sense of humour that the man should unwittingly joke so near the truth.

'He's been very kind to me, and I'd like to go to him as soon as I can walk,' he said.

'Shall I go and fetch him here?'

'Oh! if you will!' cried the boy, eagerly. 'Tell him it's Robin, and he'll come d'rectly.' He described the house, and the man nodded.

'I know it; least, I know the neighbourhood, which means pretty much the same thing. Now you lie still and get well; I'll bring him 'long, never you fear.'

He went out, and Willie lay picturing the meeting. What

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would Mr. Gower say? Would he come? Perhaps he would be drunk, and then he wouldn't listen or know anything about it.

A woman came in and gave him something to eat and drink, and told him that one of the men had brought him in the night before, insensible and wet through. He asked a few questions, but soon lapsed into silence. It seemed many hours before the man came back, and he grew tired of waiting.

'He won't hurry, won't Forset,' said the woman coolly. 'He won't be back afore dark.'

But he came in before dusk; came alone.

'Where is he?' cried Willie, starting up.

'Well, a pretty consid'rable distance from here, I reckon.'

'Wasn't he there?'

'No, nor won't be again in a hurry. He's shut up shop and gone, bag and baggage.'

'But where has he gone? Didn't he leave any message for me?' said the boy, struggling with his disappointment.

'He left word with a chap on t'other side of the landing that he was off to Birmingham, and if anybody came a-asking after him he was to tell him that. That's all I heerd.'

'To Birmingham!'

Bewildered and troubled the boy lay repeating the words to himself; he could not realize it, could not understand it. Why had he gone so suddenly to Birmingham? What was the meaning of it? But there was one comfort, he had left a message for him; he never doubted that it was for him, and that he was to follow.

'Oh,' said Forset, carelessly, as if he had just remembered it, 'he did say summut about Robin, if that's you.'

'Yes! that's me! I thought he'd leave a message for me.'

'Well, 'tain't much of a message. I forget what it was rightly; summut about your going after him.'

The boy gazed at him with distrustful eyes, but did not speak.

'If you don't believe me, go and ask the man yerself,' said Forset, in an injured tone.

Winter mentally resolved that he would ask him as soon as he was able to walk. At present all the strength seemed to have left him, and he could only lie still and think and sleep. He was left very much to himself the next two or three days; the old woman waited upon him, but took little notice of him. All day the men were out, but usually came home towards

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dusk, bringing others with them, and sat and smoked till late into the night. From their talk he gathered that they were about to leave London for Birmingham, and his restless brain began to scheme plans for accompanying them. He was rather flattered by the notice they began to take of him, and the third night took his place among them, drinking and smoking as much as he dared.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE MOUNTAIN SIDE.

THE ex-convict's story was partly true, partly false. Gower had left his lodgings, leaving behind him a message for Winter; but that message had nothing whatever to do with Birmingham. He had been somewhat alarmed by the boy's absence the first night; it was a thing that had not occurred before, and he feared some accident had befallen him. All the day he stayed in, possessed by one of his fits of gloomy despondency. He had plenty of work, for his brilliant pen was appreciated by those always on the look-out for some fallen literary star, whose doom it was to be their prey. But when these strange moods were on him he could not work; the pen fell idly from his nerveless fingers, as thought and memory hurried him to other scenes.

He did not dare look at the future; brief visions of it would ever and again flit before him, but only to be banished with shuddering dread. His never absent companion stood by his side, but even *it* had lost somewhat of its old power; he drank, but the spirit sometimes failed in its accustomed action, and refused to give even brief respite from the remorse which was becoming his daily, hourly torture.

Brooding over the dreary past, and still drearier present, he waited till night, and then went out. He knew very little of Winter's habits, or where he went when alone; but he had seen him with other boys sometimes, one of whom he knew by sight; a bold-looking, insolent boy, who lived in the next house.

Scarcely expecting to find him at home, he went up and knocked. A surly-looking man opened the door, and demanded his business in no courteous tone.

'Is your son at home?' asked Gower.

'No, he ain't.'

'Little Winter has not been home since yesterday morning,

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and I am afraid some accident has happened to him. I thought perhaps your son might know something about him.'

The man knew Winter well, and had rather a liking for him, as indeed most of the men who knew him had.

'Well, sir,' he said, more civilly, 'I'll ask him as soon as he comes in. I hope no harm's come to the whistler.'

'To the what?' asked Gower.

'The whistler, we call him, 'cause of his voice; little Winter, I mean. I don't think there's much fear of him; he's a cute 'un is the whistler. I've knowed him since he wur so high, an' he's only got into trouble once. Howsomever, I'll ask my boy!'

Gower thanked him, and turned away. The fog was so thick that he could scarcely see the lamp before the door. He would have gone out in search of some excitement, something to take him out of himself if he had dared; but he dared not. He could not trust himself in that blinding, bewildering fog; he had so little command over himself, so little control over his nerves. So he went back to his own room, and sat down moodily before the fire. He had become attached to the boy, and did not like his absence. He did not for one moment think he had deserted him; his fears ran in another direction. What if he had got into trouble and was lying in a prison cell; or had met with an accident, and was stretched, white with pain, perhaps with death, in some huge hospital ward?

As he conjured up vision after vision a knock disturbed him, and the boy from next door came in.

'Father says you've been asking after Winter,' he said, brusquely, 'I've on'y just come in, and he told me to come and tell you.'

'You have seen him, then?'

'No; I haven't seen him myself, but a chap wot I knows was there, and he told me all about it.'

'Told you what? Why don't you say?' said Gower, sharply.

'Well, I'm a-going to, ain't I?' replied the boy, in an injured tone. 'Yer needn't snap a feller up so sharp. He was at the "Barrer and Sparrer" last night 'long with a lot of 'em, and Mr. Lyon came in and took him away.'

'But how could he? He did not take him by force, did he? He would never do that!'

'Oh, wouldn't he, though! he just did then. Took him up in his arms and carried him away.'

'Then he was drunk!' cried Gower.

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'He weren't! You'd never catch Mr. Lyon drunk.'

'Not Mr. Lyon, you little idiot. Robin, I mean—Winter.'

'Oh him! he was so—fell down flat. *He* was a flat to go for to do it afore Mr. Lyon.'

'And Mr. Lyon carried him off. Do you know where he took him?'

'To his menagerie, most likely,' said the boy, carelessly. 'He's sure to be took care of; so yer needn't fear for the whistler.'

'What do you call his menagerie?'

'His house; he's got a lot of little chaps there living with him. I don't call it a menagerie, other folks do.'

'I don't see any sense in it.'

'There ain't any; on'y yer see they were like little wild beasteses when they were took there, and then his name's lion, which is the king beast; so they made out it was a 'nargerie. This fog do make yer dry, don't it, guv'nor?'

The boy's eyes were fixed longingly upon the bottle, but Gower refused to take the hint.

'I wonder why he didn't come back to-day,' he said, musingly. 'It's too late now; perhaps it was the fog.'

'Catch the whistler afraid of a fog!' said the boy, with supreme contempt. 'He likes it in an ordinary way; it's such a lark to see folks trying to find out where they are.'

'There, be off with you,' said Gower, flinging some coppers at him. 'You can come and tell me if you hear anything more about Winter.'

'So that is it, is it, Mr. Lyon?' he exclaimed, sarcastically, rising from his seat, and pacing the floor with rapid steps. 'You think I am no safe guardian for the child! You fear for his morals with such a depraved, abandoned character as I! Oh! most excellent Lyon, I fear me your benevolent interposition is too late! The canker hath eaten in too deep!'

He stopped, arrested by his own words. Were they true? Was the boy beyond all hope of reformation? If so, what a terrible future lay before him! Worse than his in one sense, because longer.

A feeling of intense pity came over him! pity for the child thus early steeped in ruin and sin; for his joyless boyhood, his hopeless youth!

'And at his age I was happy, careless, sinless!' he groaned, sinking into his seat and dropping his head on his hands. He

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was subject to these sudden revulsions of feeling, which were owing in a large degree to his impulsive temperament. He saw the boy in a new light, cast upon him by his own defiant words, and his mood changed from contemptuous anger to remorse and self-condemnation.

What had he done for the boy? What had he been to him? He might have stood between him and the evil genius of his fate; he might have opposed the strength of his influence against the onward, *almost* resistless tide of tempting circumstances.

Ah, he *might have done!* God help those whose *might have dones* and *might have beens* condemn them!

He wondered what the boy was doing, if he had spoken of *him* to Lyon, if he had betrayed his present abode. Then he laughed scornfully at himself, for even for one moment supposing that Lyon cared to know. Had he not refused his overtures of friendship, and flung him contempt and scorn and insult when he had asked for help?

And now he would make Robin despise him, too; he would make a little canting hypocrite of him, and teach him to *pity* the poor down-trodden drunkard who had not sufficient determination and strength of will to break the cursed chains of an evil habit.

He called it an *evil habit* in his anger and resentment, but he felt that it gained the sway of a second nature. The tempter lay before him now, and though he loathed it, he loved it! To take it from him would be to doom him to madness, to feverish delirium. The very thought made him stretch out his hand and snatch the bottle to him as if already he saw it gliding beyond his reach.

In a vain attempt to rid himself of the burden of thought he took up a book which he had picked up at an old bookstall. The title had attracted him: "Extract of Bacchus: a Literary Draught for the Drinker."

Opening it at random he tried to read:—

'I wept, because I thought of my own condition. Of *that* there is no hope that it should ever change. The waters have gone over me! But out of the black depths, could I be heard, I would cry out to all those who have but set a foot in the perilous flood. Could the youth, to whom the flavour of his first wine is delicious as the opening scenes of life or the

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entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man shall feel himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will—to see his destruction and have no power to stop it, and yet to feel it all the way emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him, and yet not to be able to forget a time when it was otherwise; to bear about the piteous spectacle of his own self-ruin:—could he see my fevered eyes, feverish with last night's drinking, and feverishly looking for this night's repetition of the folly; could he feel the body of the death out of which I cry hourly with feebler and feebler outcry to be delivered—it were enough to make him dash the sparkling beverage to the earth in all the pride of its mantling temptation; to make him clasp his teeth,

> "and not undo 'em
> To suffer WET DAMNATION to run thro' 'em."

Yea, but (methinks I hear somebody object) if sobriety be that fine thing you would have us understand, if the comforts of a cool brain are to be preferred to that state of heated excitement which you describe and deplore, what hinders in your instance that you do not return to those habits from which you would induce others never to swerve? If the blessing be worth preserving, is it not worth recovering?

Recovering!—Oh if a wish could transport me back to those days of youth, when a draught from the next clear spring could slake any heats which summer suns and youthful exercise had power to stir up in the blood, how gladly would I return to thee, pure element, the drink of children, and of child-like hermit! In my dreams I can sometimes fancy thy cool refreshment purling over my burning tongue. But that which refreshes innocence only makes me sick and faint.'

He flung down the book with a muttered curse. Poor Lamb's wretched lamentation over his miserable fate was perfectly familiar to him, but never till now had it appeared to him as the picture of his own condition.

Each sentence burned into his brain, each word bore new and fearful meaning. It was no stranger who had written them! it was someone who had dived into the future, who had singled him out and entered into his inmost thoughts! In time past his pity had been roused for the unfortunate victim

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of the great social curse, but now his pity was for himself, for was he not the object of misery and ruin whom the words represented?

He would not touch the book again, but kicked it into a corner. It was merely a series of extracts from various writers on the same subject as 'Lamb's Confession.' He wanted to read no more of them. One was enough. *It* recalled scenes he would fain have buried, revived memories of a painful past.

In sheer desperation he drank again and again, till insensibility banished thought, and he staggered to his bed, there to lie till the morning brought light and returning consciousness.

The next day dawned, dull and chill. Dispirited and moody he rose and prepared his solitary breakfast, listening intently for a well-known footstep on the stairs. He did not know till then how accustomed he had grown to the handsome little face which had attracted him from the very first. He missed the boy's half-familiar, half-respectful talk, his numerous questions, and undisguised admiration. It was the last he missed the most, for fallen as he was from all possibility of his peers' respect, he clutched eagerly at this drowning man's straw, this one atom of food for his dying self-respect.

The stillness of his room became at last unbearable, and seizing his hat, he hurried out, determined to seek relief in the life and bustle of the streets. Recollecting that it was possible Robin might return during his absence he turned back and left the message which Forset afterwards received and altered.

'If Robin comes in while I am out, tell him I shall be back to-night.'

Then he went out, and a sudden longing came over him to get out of the smoke and crowd into the pure air of the country. He knew it was winter there still, that no leaves were on the trees, no hedgerows were bursting into radiant bloom.

'But I shall be able to breathe,' he murmured. 'I am stifled and choking for want of fresh air! Even the smell of the earth, the untrodden earth, will be sweet as the sweetest perfume to me.'

Hurrying off to the nearest station he took train, naming his destination at random, knowing nothing of the place save that it was many miles from London. He travelled third-class, for his means would allow no other. The compartment was empty, but at a small station a number of workmen with their tools got in. One of them spoke to him, and he noticed that

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his tone was respectful, as if he recognized a social superiority. It gratified him, and when the man left the train he put his hand in his pocket and gave him one of his few remaining shillings.

The place on his ticket was reached at last, and he alighted at a little wayside station. No one else got out; it was scarcely a village even; only a hamlet, and farther on a few scattered farm-houses.

A change had come over the weather since he had left town. The sun had burst out in early spring-time brightness, and the blue sky was cloudless and serene.

On he went, past every cottage, out into the lonely country. The road was wide and dry, bordered by high banks covered with emerald moss, fresh and green and springy, and with clinging ivy and silver lichen. Giant elms spread out their spectre arms, as if in readiness to receive the spring's glad gift of a leafy robe, and little gladsome birds made music in sweet, pure air.

It was all so fresh and bright, so full of whispered promise of hope and beauty. Even the bare boughs seemed to speak, and the hedgerows had a language of their own. It was the beginning of another day to them; they had slept their sleep; they had garnered up their strength for a glorious awakening, and now there lay before them the bright warm day of sunshine, of happy, radiant spring, of golden summer and dreamy autumn!

He did not fully realize his thoughts; he did not think them out in so many words; he was not capable of it then. But they were there, and something of the contrast between himself and nature dawned upon him, dropping a shadow of deepest melancholy, and the pathos of his own life's poem touched his heart with unutterable sadness.

As noon drew near he felt faint and thirsty. A little way in front of him a lonely farm-house stood in its huge yard, with giant stacks for sentinels. A woman was standing at the door, shading her eyes with her hands, while a little child clamoured to be taken up 'to look for father.' He stopped, and asked if she would sell him a glass of beer, but she shook her head.

'We are out o' beer, sir,' she said, scanning him with her quick woman's eye. 'You are welcome to as much milk as you can drink, if that will do.'

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'Yes, it will do; and can you let me have a mouthful of bread and cheese? I have walked a long way, and am far from home.'

'It's home-made bread, and none of the whitest, sir; but it's wholesome. Will you walk in?'

There was a straw-stack half pulled down in the corner of the stack-yard, and he looked at it with wistful eyes.

Divining the unspoken wish, she said, pleasantly, 'Maybe you'd like to have a sniff of the stacks. Town folks think a heap of it, I know; and indeed I don't wonder; it is sweeter than the flowers theirselves, I sometimes think. I'll bring the milk to you if you like to walk up.'

Gladly availing himself of the permission, he sought the fragrant stack, and threw himself down on the dry straw. Scarcely a breath of air was stirring, and not a cloud was to be seen in the clear sky. He lay back at full length, clasping his hands beneath his head, and looking up into the still azure with a strange feeling of unreality. It was like a dream, from which he would presently awake, a vision too sweet to last. Far up above him a little bird was abandoning itself to a rapture of song, and the cooing of pigeons from a distant barn came to him softened, subdued, and musical. All was calm and peaceful, and it seemed to him as if a quiet hand were laid upon the turmoil of his restless thoughts.

The pleasant voice of the woman broke the spell, as she brought home-made bread and cheese and foaming milk. He seized the glass eagerly, but shuddered as the cool, and to him insipid, draught touched his lips. But he was thirsty, and there was nothing else to drink.

'This is a quiet spot,' he said; 'quite out of the way of the world.'

'Yes, we don't see many strange faces here. You are from some town, maybe?'

'I was in London at ten o'clock.'

'It's a wicked place I've heard, sir. I've never been there myself. I s'pose it's good and bad like other places.'

'More bad than good, I'm afraid.'

Her face grew shadowed. 'It's dreadful full of temptations they say. I've a son there.'

She looked wistfully at him, as if dreading that he could tell her something which would make her heart sink. 'You wouldn't be like to come across him, I s'pose?'

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'No. Is he in good hands?'

'I'm afraid not; I'm afraid he's got into bad company. He don't write as he used to. But there's a lot of good men in London, they say, isn't there, sir?'

'Oh yes; some of the best men on earth. "The choice of the race are there,"' he replied, dreamingly, his thoughts flying to one man standing out in bold relief against a sombre background of crime and sin.

'Ah well,' said the woman, with a sigh of relief, 'maybe one of them will come across my boy, and give him a bit of help. I'm glad you say there are so many good men there.'

She went back to the house, leaving him alone. He smiled pityingly at her simple faith in the power of good; if she but knew all he knew she might indeed fear for her boy in those city wilds, where the sceptre of right and truth held little sway, and the powers of the kingdom of darkness reigned supreme.

A curious thought came to him as he lay listlessly watching the sun shining through the loose straw above him. What made him look at things so differently now from what he used to do? Time was when the sole end and aim of life was to rise in the world's estimation, to shine before his fellows, to maintain a character for high honour and uprightness. And that was in the days when he was comparatively sinless. Could it be that as he sank his ideal rose? That the more he realized of sin, of degradation and self-humiliation, the higher grew the height of manhood's honour, of human capability? He could feel within him now a consciousness of far nobler possibilities than he had dreamed of in the days before he fell—visions of a grander destiny than ever his buoyant youth had seen rose up before him, beckoning him to rise and follow.

It was no longer the cry of his sadder moods, 'Oh that I were as in times past! that I could recover that which I have lost!' He had gone beyond that. There was a greater contrast to the present than the past; there was more to be gained than a mere recovery.

'It is the curse of sin,' he murmured; 'the further we recede from the shores of Paradise the more we see of their boundless range. If I dared have an aspiration it would mount higher than the dreams of my youth. After all, what were they?—their limit was soon reached. If we are immortal, nothing short

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of the boundless will satisfy us; it must be perpetual rise or an endless fall!'

Which was it to be for him? He turned restlessly on the crisp straw, trying to dissipate his thoughts, and presently fell asleep. And as he slept he dreamed.

He thought he was climbing a mountain-side, lone and steep. Huge rocks stood round him on every hand, and towered high above him as if ready to fall upon his head. It was evening, and the gloom of night was gathering round, and he toiled on faint and weary and sad at heart. At last he reached a platform, from which he gazed down into the sombre depths below. He could not see the valley, for colossal clouds rolled in stately, solemn silence along the mountain side, hiding all beneath. Now and then through a break he caught a brief glimpse of far away unfathomable depths, which made him shudderingly wonder how he had climbed so far. He could not see the mountain top, for that, too, was wrapped about with majestic pyramids of impenetrable cloud, which hung above him in gloomy grandeur. A sudden impulse came upon him to throw himself down and see how long it would be before he reached the valley, and stepping to the edge, he was about to spring, when a firm hand grasped him and drew him back. He could not see who held him, for dark drifts of cloud came between them; but he heard a voice which sounded strangely familiar,—

'It is better to climb than to fall. Look up.'

He turned his eyes upward, and saw that the clouds were gradually dissipating from around the mountain peak. Down the mountain side they rolled in huge pillars of vapoury mist, losing themselves in the darkness beneath. Pale fleecy veils and wreaths of mist wound themselves round the solid rocks, and then vanished into space. He heard a sound as of a rushing wind, and saw a gleam of distant rosy light; and then his hand was taken, and he was led on up the mountain's rugged side. But a voice he knew called him back.

'Oh, don't go and leave me alone—come back to me!' it entreated, and his guide stopped and listened, and answered,—

'Come with us, Willie.'

And then he awoke. A light breeze was playing with his hair, and the sunlight was flickering upon his face. He felt chilly, and starting up saw that a shawl had been thrown over him. Taking it on his arm, he went towards the house, meeting the woman at the door,

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'I was afraid you'd catch cold,' she said, apologetically. 'The air's keen yet. Will you walk in, sir?'

He refused, and asked how much he was indebted to her; but she would take no payment for a 'bit of bread and cheese.' A little tuft of snowdrops were gleaming by the side of the house, and he asked if he might take one. With a smile she picked them all and gave them to him, and then he went away.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

'FOR YOUR LOVED SAKE.'

LEAVING the high road, he turned down a grassy lane, and wandered on till he came to a running brook and rustic bridge. Leaning against the rail, he dreamily watched the clear, bright waves, as they rippled and babbled beneath. His lips were parched and dry, and he longed for one draught to quench his thirst; not of the pure water, but of the fiery drink which alone had power to satisfy him. He remembered the time when he would have gladly sprung to that limpid stream, and carried its sparkling drops to his thirsty lips; but that was before he had resigned his freedom and bound himself a prisoner. Turning sharply away, the snowdrops fell from his hand down into the stream, and with an eagerness the simple flowers scarcely seemed to warrant, he sprang down the bank on the other side of the bridge, and rescued them as they floated by. Tenderly he shook them free from the shining drops, and laid them on the rail in the warm sunshine, while he gathered damp moss to wrap round their stems.

There was something more than mere artistic admiration evinced in the gentleness of his touch; there was a sorrowful tenderness, as if they were something very sacred and precious.

'She loved them,' he murmured; 'they were the last flowers she ever saw; her favourite flowers.'

Taking a small case out of his pocket, he opened it, and gazed long at its contents. It was the picture of a girl's face; a beautiful face, of a faultless oval, with slightly foreign features, and large, dark, wistful eyes. Masses of rich dark hair were gathered in coils round the classic head, and among them clustered a few white snowdrops, their snowy petals contrasting vividly with their dark surroundings.

It was such a girlish face, almost childish in its youthfulness, and yet there rested upon it the shadow of a deep and bitter

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grief. The sweet eyes seemed full of unshed tears, and the red lips looked as if their quivering had ceased but for a moment.

As he gazed upon it, his face softened and altered; the troubled, care-worn lines disappeared, and the moody look departed from his eyes. For a few brief moments the present was forgotten, and the past rose vividly before him. It did not seem so very long since those beautiful eyes had been raised to his, and the frank lips had spoken words of love; not very long since the little hand had lain so trustingly in his, or had pushed back the hair from his fevered brow; and ah! not very long since he had rained passionate kisses upon a dear, dead face, and folded the little quiet hands for their long, last rest!

With a groan he shut the case and thrust it in his pocket. What a mockery seemed the bright sunshine and the songs of the happy birds; what had he in common with Nature's joyous mood? Nothing! In the dreary waste of his ruined life there was no room for song or mirth!

The sun was sinking in the west, and gathering up the flowers, he hastened to retrace his steps. It was twilight when he reached the little station, and he had to wait half an hour for his train. It seemed a long half-hour as he paced the narrow platform, and he hailed the whistle of the approaching train with a sense of relief. And yet he was loth to leave the open country for the close confines of his dreary lodgings; he felt as if he were going back to the haunt of his evil genius.

Half expecting to see Robin, he hurried up the dark stairs and threw open the door. The room was empty, and he was conscious of a sense of disappointment. Where could the boy be? Then all his doubts of Lyon began to return, and he fancied him arguing with Robin, and dissuading him from returning to his old career.

'He will bribe him to stay with him,' he thought; 'he will offer such inducements as few boys could resist. I must not be hard upon Robin. Is it likely he will return here when he can stay in comfort and with companions of his own age? It is natural he should choose the brighter lot, poor little fellow!'

And yet, though he tried to excuse him, he felt very sore at heart; he had learned to look upon him, young as he was, as a sort of comrade, over whom he had unbounded influence and authority. He had become accustomed to him, and trusted him, and now he had deserted him.

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As he sat and thought, he heard his opposite neighbour come up the stairs, and went out to meet him.

'Have you seen anything of my boy?'

The man, who was more than half drunk, stared at him.

'Oh, it's you, is it? No, but a man's been asking after you, and he said the boy wasn't coming back: he'd got into a better berth.'

'What sort of a man was he?'

'Why, just like any other man! What should he be like? A helephant?' was the surly reply.

'If you had named another of the animal creation, my friend, you might have been nearer the mark,' said Gower, sarcastically.

He went back to his room with one thought uppermost: Robin had betrayed him, and Lyon had come to seek him. He never doubted that it was Lyon who had sought him: who else could it be?

There was then only one thing for him to do: he must leave his lodgings and seek another home at once. He shrank from the very thought of meeting Lyon again. The hot flush of shame rose to his brow as he pictured their interview: Lyon calm, self-possessed in his conscious superiority; *he* down in the depths of an acknowledged degradation.

For it was acknowledged; no one saw more plainly than himself his own position. With humiliation he looked back upon the life he had led of late years, with its gradual loss of all that makes life precious, and he despised himself. Perhaps it was this feeling which made him shrink from one whom he felt to be so immeasurably superior as Lyon. He recognised his nobility of character, his uncompromising sense of honour, his lofty aspirations, and while they compelled him to pay reluctant respect, they brought into vivid contrast his own weak, vacillating nature.

And yet he hesitated to fly from the only one in the world who could help him out of the valley of darkness. His dream was still before him, and he seemed to hear the words, 'It is better to climb than to fall.'

'If I were superstitious,' he thought, 'I should take it as an omen.'

But though he was not superstitious he could not divest himself of the feeling, that it rested with himself to bring about its fulfilment; the outstretched hand was there, the valley lay

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around him, its deepest depths still below: the mountain rose above him, and now it was for him to decide whether he would climb or fall.

The events of the day had made a deep impression upon him. Nature with her still small voice had appealed to his better self, and he had been in the mood to listen. She had stirred up his memory, given impulse to a long dormant instinct of self-preservation, roused within him a desperate longing for emancipation from the shackles of his own imposing.

'Oh! if I could but break the cursed chain,' he exclaimed, pacing his narrow room. 'Fool that I was to sell my birthright! will nothing restore it? Am I doomed to be my own victim for all eternity? Is the mountain top only attainable in a dream?'

The answer was ready; the dream was but a shadow of the truth: the reality lay within his grasp if he had but strength to make it his. But he had not strength: he knew it. He knew that in the morning, or at least the next evening, he would yield and sink and forge yet another link even stronger than the last.

'If I could but keep my present mood!' he groaned; large drops of perspiration rolling down his face, wrung from him by his intensity of anguish. 'I could resist it now, but this strength is only for a time; I know myself too well! To-morrow I shall have lost even the wish to free myself. What is the use of tormenting myself with visions of impossible things? *I*, the miserable slave of a vacillating mood!'

And yet, though he uttered the words with bitter self-contempt, all the manhood of his nature rose up against them. They were true, and they were not true. Time past had proved them true, but was the eternity of his future to be at the mercy of a time-born curse? The Divine within him said NO, and he seized the answer as the one barrier between him and the fatal leap into the depths of a hopeless despair.

Nerved by it he placed himself before the bar of his own tribunal, and pleaded for his own future. With a stern determination not to spare himself, he drew out of his pocket the portrait case and opened it, laying it on the table before him. Then taking pencil and paper, he wrote down with resolute hand the losses of his life; not those which had come to him, but those which he had brought upon himself.

His lips slightly trembled, but he compressed them firmly as

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the list grew ominously long. Home, position, friends, money, self-respect—all gone!

'Great God, what a wreck!' he cried, dashing down the pencil and starting to his feet with uncontrollable emotion. In the silence of the night his words fell strangely on his ear. He had never fallen into the too common failing of irreverence; it had always appeared to him essentially bad form to use the name of God lightly, as a mere exclamation, and now it fell from his lips unconsciously, startling him with the unwonted sound.

And yet it was but natural: as the revelation of his own weakness burst upon him, he turned instinctively to his preconceived idea of resistless strength, of limitless Power. For he was no atheist theoretically, though he had tried sometimes to persuade himself of the non-existence of a God; he was forced to believe against his will. And now, having arrived at a standpoint in the experiment of his life, acknowledging it a failure, he appealed unconsciously to the recognised Ruler of the universe.

But the words suggested no pleasant train of thought; the idea presented was that of strength and power, alone, personified in a 'Cast-iron God.' He turned from it with indifference, even dislike, as affording no sense of comfort or help; and never in his life had he so felt the need of help. There was the mountain-top of a regained position; but the way was too rugged for him to climb alone.

His thoughts went back to those few brief weeks with Lyon, when he had to a certain extent resisted the evil genius of his life, and freed himself from its thraldom. If he had persevered then, he would have risen triumphant above his vanquished foe; but he had weakly given way, and victory was now farther off than ever.

As he paced the room arguing, reasoning with himself in the attempt to gather up courage for a binding resolution, his eye fell upon the cupboard, and a sudden thought came.

Inside that cupboard was a bottle of brandy: suppose he took it out, and pouring out a glassful, placed it before him on the table, and then sat down and watched it; could he resist the temptation to drink? He dared not answer.

The impulse to risk it and test his strength became overpowering, and with trembling hands he unlocked the cupboard door and took out the bottle. Sitting down by the table he

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took a glass, and deliberately filling it with the brandy, placed it in front of him.

A church clock near was striking eleven, and he counted the strokes mechanically.

'If I resist it till one, and then have strength to throw it away, there is yet a ray of hope!' he murmured. 'For your dear memory's sake, my wife, I will make this one attempt.'

The pictured face looked up to him with wistful, pleading eyes. To his excited imagination they seemed to possess life and the old witching language of love. He bent over them with passionate words, and pressed his burning lips upon the senseless ivory.

'For your sweet memory's sake! Mi Catterina! My wife! My lost darling! Are you listening? Can you hear? *For your sake!* For your loved sake! Mi Catterina!'

But the hopelessness of calling upon the loved name came over him with a rush, and checked the words upon his lips. Silently, with painfully contracted brow, he sat watching the sweet face, while strange questionings rose in his mind. Questions that every man asks some time in his life, sooner or later. It is easy in the hey-day of prosperity and careless happiness to ignore the unpleasant subject of possible separation from those we love, but there comes a time in each life's history when the subject is forced upon the reluctant mind, and then it is that these persistent questions come. Where are they now? the loved and lost! What are they doing in the dim mysterious *beyond?*

Most thoughtful minds have some dreamy visions of what is going on across the border; each is probably influenced by his own particular bias, or his own particular need. The worn-out, weary worker pictures a blissful rest; the sorrow-laden, immunity from trouble and care; the sufferer, ease from anguish and pain. Some look forward to the mysterious glories pictured in the Revelation, and others, deeming these figurative, imagine a Paradise of all that their earthly senses crave. Streams and rivers, hills and dales, and flowery meadows; pleasant groves, filled with the sweet songs of birds; never-fading sunshine, and music from a myriad harps. They make this world a faint imagery of the world beyond, and fancy the beauties there but an exaggeration of those here. Some say they are content to 'leave it,' whatever that may mean, and resolutely put down all speculation as vain and unprofitable.

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But he had no preconceived ideas, no already formed arbitrary notions. In fact, the subject was entirely strange to him. He had occasionally wondered what *she* was doing or where *she* was, but he had never attempted to learn anything definite. Floating in his brain were vague and dreamy recollections of sermons he had sleepily listened to in the old days; sermons which dealt in flowery descriptions of some far-off Eden, and with these he had been content.

But now, with such a vivid recollection of the buoyant life that had once flooded the veins of his lost darling, it was hard to imagine her the automaton harpist, which was all his fancy pictured the inhabitants of the fashionable Eden. He craved for something more than that now, but had no idea whatever where to go for information.

It was weary work, sitting there in the still night, pondering over an—to him—unanswerable question. It became unendurable at last, and he tried to turn his thoughts elsewhere; but what, in certain moods, is more difficult than to find something to think about?

The quarters struck slowly, falling on his ear like a funeral knell. Only half-past eleven, and already it seemed as if he had sat there for hours. He took one turn round the room, and then returned to his seat. Could he hold out for another hour and a half?

He was not left to himself; busy voices were at work, whispering dark suggestions. 'What does it matter to anyone whether you rise or fall? It is easier to fall than to climb; what a fool you are to torment yourself for a mere chimera of your own imagination! There is no such thing as *recovered* self-respect. You are down in the depths, and there you must remain. Take life as it is, and get as much out of it as you can. You have gone too far to retrace your steps; a short life and a merry one should be your motto now. *Drink!*'

How tempting it looked! What promise was in its liquid depths! One deep, deep draught, and the waves of Lethe would flow over his burning brain! Could he hold out?

Another quarter! soon it would be midnight, and half his ordeal past. Strength seemed to be slowly ebbing, and his face grew haggard with the mental strain. Surely time had never yet dragged on so slowly; each moment was a heavy weight. And it was his own hand that was pressing him down into the torture!

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Midnight! Solemnly the strokes fell upon the silent night. He listened with bated breath, and as the last sound died away a wild exultation came upon him.

'Gone! gone! And now comes another day! The victory shall be mine! Nay, thine, mi Catterina! Who says I have lost all self-control? Who says reason has lost its sway? My brain is clear and my hand is steady! The victory is mine! I care not for minutes or hours! I am strong! I could dip my lips in the glass and drink the drops one by one, counting them, and stopping when it was my pleasure!'

An insane desire to try the experiment made him seize the glass and lift it to his lips; but before he could touch a drop a violent fit of shuddering came over him, and the glass fell from his hands upon the table. He sat as if stupefied, watching the brown rivulets as they trickled to the ground. Was it a warning to him? Once before the glass had been dashed from his grasp, but by a mortal hand, and he had resented the act. Vividly the scene rose before him: he saw Lyon's face with its firm lips and fearless eyes; he heard his voice, with its earnest, almost passionate ring, as he had heard it often, and all his old yearning for the companionship and friendship of this one man whom he had been forced to respect came back to him with redoubled force. There had been times when the longing to feel the grasp of the strong hand, and hear the sound of the cordial voice had been almost irresistible; but the power of his false pride had forced it down. How could he seek the man who had saved his life at the risk of his own, and whom he had requited with ingratitude, indifference, and, at times, almost dislike? He could not for very shame.

And now came the thought, 'He is seeking me; he is ready, willing to renew the old terms.'

'But he refused to come to you in your hour of direst need!' was the immediate answer. 'He scorned you then! Can you forgive it? Can you forget it?'

The hot flush of resentment rushed to his brow, and rising hastily he exclaimed, 'Never! never till I can face him on equal terms, and force from him his utmost respect! That would be something to live for.'

The words roused him to fresh resolution. Again he filled the glass, listening with renewed hope to the strike of another quarter. The very thought of Lyon seemed to inspire him with strength; and with determination more firm and un-

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wavering than before he sat and waited. As the time drew near he grew rigid with intense excitement. Only a few more minutes, and the victory would be his.

But even then, while listening with drawn breath for that momentous stroke, the temptation to give in was stronger than ever. It came over him with mighty force, almost dragging him to the fatal glass, and shaking him from head to foot with its fierce, determined power.

And at its height the clock struck one. With a cry of mad triumph he sprang to his feet.

'Saved! saved! saved!' he shouted, dashing the glass upon the hearth. 'I defy thee! thou that hast no name to be called by save that of devil! Spirit of the destroyer, cursed demon of drink, I hurl thee defiance! I am free! thy power is broken!'

Throwing open the window he hurled the bottle far upon some neighbouring roofs, and listened, with the light of delirium in his eyes, to the crash of the breaking glass.

Then came the inevitable reaction: he had scarcely strength to close the window, and stagger, weak and trembling, to the bed. The room seemed to turn round, and he sank down, nerveless and exhausted, conscious only of a terrible conflict.

But it was past and gone, and then he knew no more for many hours.

His first feeling when he awoke was one of deep depression. For some time he could recall nothing of the past events, but the sight of the broken glass brought them all to his mind. Then he took up the chain where he had dropped it.

In a very short time his scanty belongings were gathered together: one old carpet bag held them all: and telling his landlady that she was at liberty to let his room at once if she pleased, he left the house to return no more.

Two or three days after his departure Winter slowly mounted the staircase and knocked at the door. A woman's voice bade him come in, and with a sinking heart he lifted the latch.

A gaunt-looking Irishwoman was sitting by the fire nursing a fretful child. Five other children were quarrelling over their dinner, and a man was lying asleep on what had once been the boy's bed.

It was all true, then! *He* had gone to Birmingham.

'What do ye want?' said the woman, sharply.

Muttering a few unintelligible words, he shut the door and

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went downstairs; then recollecting that a message had been left for him, he went back and knocked at the opposite door. There was no answer, and no sound within; after knocking again, and trying the door, which he found locked, he went down and out into the street.

There was only one thing left for him to do! he must follow Mr. Gower to Birmingham. He had often heard of the place, and knew it to be something after the fashion of London; a smoky, dingy town, full of the life and bustle he was accustomed to. Fond of travel, as are most boys, the prospect pleased him, and he waited anxiously that night for the return of the men.

They did not know he had been out, and when he told them, Forset's brow darkened. His tale concerning Lyon had been a chance hit, and he had hoped to leave for Birmingham before the boy was well enough to go and inquire for himself. He only guessed where he had been, for Winter was too wary to tell him, and his reappearance among them puzzled him at first. He came to the conclusion that their tales of Birmingham had proved too fascinating, and that old friends were to be deserted for new.

This solution was confirmed when the boy asked him if he might go with them.

'I'll pay you for my fare; I will indeed!' he exclaimed eagerly. 'I can easy get money there, I know, and I'll pay you honest, if you'll take me with you.'

A furtive smile crossed Forset's face, and for some minutes he demurred, yielding at last with feigned reluctance.

'Well, I don't mind, if you promise to do us a good turn when you can; you're a cute little beggar, and I've taken rather a fancy to you. You shall come.'

The next morning they left London, and soon Winter found himself amid new scenes and faces.

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CHAPTER XXV.

ALISON IN A NEW LIGHT.

'PAPA, have you any objection to my going to see Mrs. Ripon?' asked Alison Wycherley, one morning at the breakfast-table. 'I should so like to go, and Mr. Lyon said it was a respectable neighbourhood.'

'His ideas of respectability and yours are probably very different,' replied Mr. Wycherley.

'But it was safe enough for them to come here, papa, so it must be safe enough for me to go there.'

'That does not follow by any manner of means. Your logic is defective, my dear.'

Alison laughed. 'I do not think it is logic at all! But seriously, papa, I really should like to go to Abbey-court. I could take Wilson with me, and she is staid and old enough to take care of me. Why shouldn't I, papa?'

'I do not like the idea at all, Alison. How do you know whom you may meet? It is not your duty to go there.'

'I should like to know what my duty is?'

'It is every lady's duty to attend to her home, and see that things are rightly ordered. You have the housekeeping to look after; what more duty do you want?'

'I have very little to do with the housekeeping. Wilson takes everything off my hands. Besides, the end and aim of a woman's life is not to attend to dinners,' said Alison, petulantly. 'I am so tired of our humdrum life, papa. I want something to fill my thoughts.'

'Why do you not write and ask Dora to come and stay with you?'

'Because I do not want her. I don't like Dora.'

Mr. Wycherley looked slightly astonished. 'Since when?' he asked.

'Since I was there last spring. Papa, I never told you, but

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there was a perceptible difference in their treatment of me. I do not mean to go there again.'

'How did they treat you?'

'They let me see very plainly that Alison Wycherley rich and Alison Wycherley poor were two very different individuals. But I do not care to recall it; it is not such a pleasant memory. What about Mrs. Ripon?'

'Well, my dear, you may please yourself,' said Mr. Wycherley, resigning himself as usual to his daughter's will. 'Have your own way, but Mr. Randolph said they were terrible places.'

'Now, papa!' exclaimed Alison, with a slight curl of her haughty lip, 'you know very well that he only said that to prevent my going. He acknowledged that he had never seen them, so what is his judgment worth? I would far rather trust Mr. Lyon.'

'He is a sensible matter-of-fact sort of man, I should say. Well, my dear, as I said before, have your own way.'

It was a bright, sunshiny morning, and Alison and her staid old servant somewhat reluctantly entered the cab which was to convey them to their destination.

'Nasty, stuffy things!' said Wilson, in disgust. 'Ah, Miss Wycherley, I never thought to see you riding in a common cab! What would Miss Dora say?'

'Now, Wilson, if you are going to lament and mourn over past glories I shall put you down and go alone. Shut your eyes and fancy it is our old carriage.'

'Eyes aren't the only sense!' said Wilson, rebelliously. 'I could tell if I were blind.'

'It is better than an omnibus, at any rate; and it is better than walking.'

Shamed by her young mistress's quiet acceptance of a necessary evil, Wilson made a great effort to recover her spirits; and as a ride through London's crowded streets was something of a novelty, she soon succeeded.

Abbey-court was easily found, and leaving the cab at the entrance, Alison went doubtfully into the dull, quiet court, in which it seemed to her, all the dinginess and melancholy of London had culminated. Mrs. Ripon's rooms were at the upper end, and she glanced curiously at the various signs of an unknown life in the open doorways as she passed. The apparition of a lady was so great a novelty in the court that it created quite a sensation; heads appeared at every door, and she was

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not sorry to turn up the stairs which led to Mrs. Ripon's room.

Mrs. Ripon opened the door, her eyes red with crying, and her face still wet with tears. On seeing Alison she uttered a surprised exclamation, and in a whisper asked her to walk in.

Alison hesitated. 'I am afraid I have come at an inconvenient time. I do not wish to disturb you—to intrude. I will call another time.'

'Oh, no, miss, please don't go away! I am so pleased to see you. Do come in,' said Mrs. Ripon, still in a whisper; and not in the least comprehending the situation, Alison went in and sat down.

'I hope nothing is the matter with the children,' she said, hearing a subdued voice in the inner room.

'Oh, no; it's Rose, miss. She burst a blood-vessel early this morning, and the doctor says she can't last long.'

'Is the doctor there?' asked Alison, wishing she had not come.

'No; it's Mr. Lyon. She kept asking so for him that I was obliged to send round and ask him to come. I've sent the children away.'

At that moment the children's kitten pushed open the inner door, which had been only half-latched, and came out. Lyon's voice, low and clear, was distinctly audible. He was praying, and Alison, not liking to move, sat still and listened.

It was the first time in her life that she had heard an extempore prayer, and she listened with critical ears, ready to detect the slightest inaccuracy of expression or grammar. But there was nothing which could offend even her ultra-fastidious taste; the language was simple and pure, yet forcible, and she found herself listening with a feeling she could not understand. Had she been subjected to the subtle influence of an æsthetic religious service, with all the accessories of an elaborate and impressive ritual, it would have been explicable enough; but what was there to excite religious feeling in that humble, poverty-stricken room, or in the extempore prayer of a self-educated working man?

'It is the power of his genius,' she thought. 'Genius forces attention and commands respect. What a pity such power is not better employed; it is wasted in him. I wonder if he has any ambition.'

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'THE APPARITION OF A LADY WAS SO GREAT A NOVELTY IN THE COURT THAT IT CREATED QUITE A SENSATION.'—*See p.* 26

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He was talking to Rose now, and Mrs. Ripon softly shut the door.

'It's hard to part with them we've got to love, isn't it, miss?' she said sorrowfully, wiping away the fast-falling tears. 'I never thought I should come to care so much for her.'

'Has she lived with you long?'

'Not many months, but it seems a deal longer. The children will miss her dreadful.'

'Has she been ill long?'

'Well, not what you may call ill, so as to keep her bed; but she's been ailing a good bit before she came to me. The doctor says she might have got well if she'd had plenty of good food and fresh air. But I couldn't get it for her.'

'Then perhaps she might get well now, if she had everything she wanted?' said Alison, eagerly; but Mrs. Ripon shook her head.

'Well, I will send some wine and soup and other things round at once,' continued Alison, rising. 'I will not stay now, Mrs. Ripon; I will come again. Would it be a relief to you if I took the children away with me?'

'They've gone for a walk with one of the neighbours' girls, miss, but I'll send them up when they come in, if you'll be so kind as to have them. It will be a relief to me, for they want so much looking after.'

'I will send the cab back for them in about an hour's time, then. One of the servants shall come, too, and bring some things for poor Rose. I wish I had known before, Mrs. Ripon; why did you not tell me?'

'You've done so much, miss; it 'ud seem like imposing on you.'

'Perhaps it is not too late now; I will ask Mr. Lyon.'

He was coming out of the inner room, and she turned towards him impulsively.

'I want to speak to you, Mr. Lyon. Are you coming down?'

He bowed, and after a few words to Mrs. Ripon, followed her downstairs.

'It is about that poor girl. Is it true that she might have got well if she had had proper, nourishing food?' she continued, eagerly, forgetting herself entirely in her earnestness and sympathy.

'Yes, it is true.'

'But is it too late? Mr. Lyon, it is dreadful to think that such a thing can be in our own land! Surely it is not too late!'

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He looked down upon her with searching eyes. Could it be that she knew so little of life that this one case among a thousand came to her as a revelation? It was incredible!

Surprised at his silence, she looked up.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I am afraid it is too late; the doctor gives no hope.'

'But perhaps another doctor——'

'It would be of no use; it is only too patent, even to an inexperienced eye. All that can be done is to alleviate her sufferings, and make her last hours less painful.'

Tears sprang to Alison's eyes. It was the first time in her life that she had been brought in contact with such things. Her mother's death she could not remember, and death itself seemed to her a far-off, dim uncertainty; a change which must come to all, sooner or later, but of which she had no realization. Indeed, it is questionable if she ever gave it a thought, and there was nothing in her daily life to remind her of it. It seemed very dreadful to her that there should be such cases as that of Rose, and, brought face to face with the facts, they assumed proportions which no newspaper reports could ever have attained.

'And Mrs. Ripon is far from strong or well,' continued Lyon. 'I am afraid she will be knocked up with nursing Rose.'

'She works too hard; she ought not to do it.'

'She *must;* must is stronger than ought, sometimes, Miss Wycherley.'

'I wish I could help her; but I can do so little; we are not rich.'

'I am glad you came to-day; you can more fully realize now what you have done. I daresay it does not seem much to you, but Mrs. Ripon holds it in different estimation. Is this your cab?'

'Yes. How little we know of the suffering there is in the world, Mr. Lyon!'

'It is a good thing we do not know all,' he replied, opening the door. 'Life would be a sorrowful thing.'

'It is that now for *them,*' she said, and he saw that her eyes were still dim. 'Mr. Lyon, I should like to make it less so for some, but I do not know how. Will you tell me?'

He stood for a moment in silence, looking into the earnest eyes, and then simply answering, '*Yes,*' lifted his hat and passed on.

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'Is anything the matter, Miss Alison?' asked Wilson, with the respectful familiarity of a privileged old servant.

'Only a poor girl dying because she could not get good food enough to keep her alive,' replied Alison, sorrowfully. 'Poverty is a cruel thing, Wilson.'

'Ah, that it is, for those that feel it! It's a good thing there are some people in the world with hearts large enough to think of others.'

The words sounded like a reproach, though Alison knew nothing was farther from Wilson's thoughts. What had she done to lighten the world's weary burden of care, and sorrow, and trouble? The very luxuriousness of her home seemed to condemn her, and hitherto undreamed-of questions of neglected opportunities began to rise in her mind.

'Well, my dear, you have come back then,' observed Mr. Wycherley.

'Yes, papa, and no worse, really, than I went.'

'What do you mean by *really?*' he asked, somewhat anxiously.

'I mean that I feel much worse than I ever did in my life! Not ill,' she added, seeing his alarmed look. 'I mean worse in a moral sense.'

'I do not understand what you mean. How has your visit affected your moral life?'

'It is just this,' she answered, dreamily. 'I used to think I did my duty, and now it seems to me as if I had not even found out what my duty was.'

'Then clearly you are not responsible for its non-performance. But I do not know what you are talking about, Alison. I do most sincerely hope you are not going to imagine yourself that most unpleasant creation, a woman with a mission, a sphere. I dislike strong-minded women exceedingly, and have no wish to see you setting off on a visiting expedition, with a bundle of tracts in one hand and a Bible in the other.'

'Papa! how can you imagine anything so absurd!' said Alison, laughing. 'My mission will never lead me to make myself ridiculous, as I should do if I meddled with such foreign things as tracts! I have seen Mr. Lyon.'

'Oh; is he coming to see me again?'

'Yes, I think so,' she answered, remembering that '*yes*.' 'I suppose no one has called?'

'Yes, they have. Mr. Randolph and his aunt. She seems a nice old lady, and inquired most kindly for you.'

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'I thought she was still abroad.'

'She came home two or three days ago. I wish you had been at home.'

'Did you tell them where I was?' asked Alison, indifferently.

'No; I thought the less said about that the better. You will not go again, I hope.'

'I have sent Jane in the cab to fetch the children here for the day,' she replied, ignoring his last sentence. 'That poor girl who lives with Mrs. Ripon is dying.'

'Dying! and you have been in the house? Alison, how exceedingly imprudent of you!' cried Mr. Wycherley, in alarm. 'There is no knowing what you have brought home!'

'I have not brought home a broken blood-vessel, and that is what is killing Rose,' said Alison, quietly.

Her father sank back, relieved. 'Oh, that is another thing, of course. I thought it was something infectious. How did it happen?'

She told him all she knew, but he listened listlessly; it possessed little interest for him.

'You might keep the children here for a day or two if you liked,' he said. 'Jane could attend to them, couldn't she? They will amuse you.'

It was a novel idea, and pleased Alison, and she went out to make arrangements for her little visitors. But the memory of all she had heard and seen that morning haunted her persistently, rousing new thoughts, and suggesting vague possibilities of a higher life-work than that of ministering only to her own love of pleasure and comfort.

The arrival of the children diverted her thoughts for a time. She was much interested in watching them and noticing the great difference between them: the one all ease and natural grace, adapting herself readily to her new circumstances; the other bashful, and full of undisguised wonder and admiration. A stranger coming in would have supposed Sybil to be the little hostess, so naturally did she act the part and patronize her companion.

Alison had them with her all the afternoon, and when she went to dinner sent them into the kitchen to have their tea. She had not been seated ten minutes when Jane came in with a face full of concern.

'If you please, Miss Wycherley, we can do nothing with the little girl little Miss Sybil! She won't eat anything, but covers

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her face with her hands and cries and says she wants you. Katie is good enough.'

'I will come directly, Jane. Tell her I am coming.'

'What makes Jane call her *Miss* Sybil?' asked Mr. Wycherley.

'The very question I was asking myself, papa. She did not say Miss Katie. I suppose she recognises the difference between them as we do. I will go and see what is the matter.'

She found the child sitting in a high chair, sobbing hysterically, with her tiny hands pressed to her face. Jane was trying to persuade her to eat, but she jerked her little elbow impatiently.

'I won't have my tea here! I don't like you! I want to have my tea in the drawin'-room, with the lady!' she sobbed, pathetically. Alison could not help laughing.

With some difficulty she pacified the insulted little lady, and promised she should have tea with her another day.

'Now fancy that,' she said, on going back to the dining-room. 'I believe the child has an innate perception of the fitness of things, and feels herself out of place in the kitchen with the servants. What *is* to become of her?'

'Perhaps you are doing the little thing no real kindness in having her here, Alison; it may make her discontented and dissatisfied with her own lot,' said her father.

'I wonder what her lot will be. Shall I adopt her, papa?'

Mr. Wycherley looked startled. 'And have some disreputable scamp claiming her for his daughter when you have trained her into your own ways,' he said, after a pause. 'It would be better for her if she were an orphan.'

'I should like to do it,' continued Alison, meditatively. 'Jane could attend to her, and it would be a pleasure to me to see to her things, and have her dressed nicely. I would teach her to read, too. Oh dear, I wish that father would go to the North Pole! he is dreadfully in the way.'

'You had better leave the child where Providence has placed her; it is her proper place, no doubt,' said her father, sententiously.

Alison opened her eyes but did not answer. It was, doubtless, a very easy and summary method of disposing of difficult subjects, but she did not quite believe in it.

After dinner another difficulty presented itself. Both the children were tired, and consequently fretful. When Jane took them to bed they began to cry, and Katie wailed piteously for her mother. The girl did all she could to quiet them, but

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without effect, and the sound penetrated to the drawing-room.

'There are those children again!' exclaimed Mr. Wycherley. 'Alison, what *is* the matter now? Why does not Jane attend to them?'

'I expect they want me,' replied Alison, with a novel sense of importance. 'I will go and see.'

She went up and tried to pacify them, but in vain.

'I want my mother!' was all she could get from Katie, and Sybil would not speak at all. She coaxed, and then tried bribery, sending Jane for chocolate creams—but still they cried. Mr. Wycherley, seriously disturbed, came up to ask if they were ill; and at last Alison grew impatient.

'If they are going to cry all night, they had better go home,' she said, and hearing this Katie opened her eyes.

'But it's a dreadful dark night out of doors!' she said, her voice quavering.

'Of course it is, and very cold, too,' replied Alison, seeing her advantage and seizing it. 'Come and look out of the window.'

She drew aside the blind, and the child tried to look into the darkness.

'It is raining fast,' observed Jane.

'I will be good now,' said Katie, meekly. 'I don't want to go out into the dark rain. I will go to sleep now.'

Feeling quite elated with her triumph, Alison put her back into bed. Sybil was still sobbing quietly, but she thought she could manage her. Sending Jane away, she spoke very gravely to the child, but without making the slightest impression; indeed, the more she talked the worse Sybil grew, until she began to despair of ever getting her quiet.

'I cannot stay here any longer,' she said, rising; 'I cannot have anything to do with such a naughty little girl. I must go and leave you.'

She went towards the door, but hearing a rustle turned round. The child had slipped out of bed and was coming after her.

'Oh, don't go! don't go!' she sobbed. 'I want to be good, but I can't! I can't be good by myself!'

Alison carried her back to bed, and then tried to reason with her; but the child was now beyond listening; she had lost all control over herself, and could only sob hysterically, holding Alison's hand tightly in her own.

'Oh don't go and leave me! don't go and leave me!'

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It was not naughtiness or temper now; the child's nervous temperament was excited beyond all control, and Alison saw that it would be cruelty to leave her. Wrapping her in a shawl she took her in her arms, and rocked her to and fro. Gradually her sobs ceased and she grew quiet, and at last fell asleep.

Her face looked singularly beautiful, as it lay flushed and tear-stained, with its frame of golden curls, and Alison watched it admiringly.

'Dear little thing,' she murmured; 'I wonder what your fate will be; not a happy one, I am afraid, with such a peculiar temperament.'

One thought suggested another, and she sat musing over the child's possible future.

'She will go to school when she is a little older,' she thought; 'and then I suppose she will help her mother, Mrs. Ripon; take in plain sewing, or perhaps she will go to service.'

The idea of Sybil in service seemed so incongruous that she dismissed it, and pursued another.

'No, she will live with Mrs. Ripon and help her as Rose does; as Rose did.'

She suddenly stopped, and unbidden came the suggestion, 'And meet with Rose's fate.'

What was to prevent it? Mrs. Ripon herself had owned that she and Rose together could not earn enough to keep them in proper wholesome food; was it more likely that this child would be able to do it?

She rose, and laying the child by the sleeping Katie, went downstairs. Her father was setting out the draughtsmen, and she sat down and began to play mechanically.

'What has come to you?' asked Mr. Wycherley, petulantly, as she lost her sixth successive game, 'you play as if you were asleep.'

'Papa, do you think that Providence is responsible for everything?' she said, abruptly. 'I mean, are we responsible for anything?'

'Of course we are. We are responsible for the correct performance of our duty.'

'There it is again,' she said, in despair. 'How are we to know where our responsibility begins? That is what I want to know. What is duty? It seems to me to be an open question; everybody has a different idea.'

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'Well, my dear, it is the sort of thing everyone must decide for himself. It is a personal question. Another man's duty is not mine, nor mine another's.'

'Then I suppose I must decide for myself what mine is?'

'To a certain extent,' said her father, wondering what she had got into her head now. 'But we are not always safe guides; people do very queer things under the cloak of duty.'

'I wish I could find out for certain. Never mind me, papa; go on. Crown him.'

Mr. Wycherley crowned her king, and the game proceeded in silence.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

WASHED IN THE FOUNTAIN.

IT was not without a great deal of hesitation that Alison again went to Abbey-court. She had promised to do so, and therefore felt that she must go: but she went reluctantly. She had a vague, uncomfortable feeling that she was somehow exposing herself to an influence which might lead to unpleasant consequences. The moral atmosphere of Abbey-court, or of that portion of it inhabited by Mrs. Ripon, was novel and somewhat interesting; but by no means one with which she would like to surround herself. What was suitable for Mrs. Ripon was far from suitable for her, she thought, and the less she had to do with it the better.

The bright look of pleasure which overspread Mrs. Ripon's pale face repaid her for the effort she had made in coming, and she lost sight of her own feelings on seeing the gratitude with which her basket of tempting delicacies was received.

'How is Rose?' she asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

Mrs. Ripon lowered her voice as she replied,—

'She worries so, miss! I'm sure I wish I knew what to say to her, but I don't. She is just fretting herself now, because I can't read a paper to her that Mr. Lyon give her some time ago. I ain't anything of a scholar, and I've to spell out all the long words and she can't bear it.'

All Alison's scruples faded away; she saw only a dying girl craving something which it was in her power to give, and she could not refuse, though instinctively she shrank from the task.

'Will she let me read it to her?' she asked, simply, and Mrs. Ripon's face brightened.

'Oh, miss! if you would be so kind!' She went into the room and told Rose, and then came back, and asked her to walk in.

With a strange out-of-place sensation, Alison went in and

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stood by the bedside. What to say she did not know: all common-place expressions seemed meaningless here, and nervously she laid her hand gently on the thin white one which lay on the coverlet and said, 'I am sorry to see you so ill, Rose.'

The large eyes looked up with a frightened expression which Alison did not then understand, but it went to her heart.

'I am a stranger to you,' she went on, gathering courage; 'but I have heard of you from Mrs. Ripon and Mr. Lyon. You do not mind my reading to you, do you? I shall be so glad to do it.'

Glad to do it! glad to read to *her* when she knew who and what she was! Then all the world was not so cruel and pitiless and hard as she had imagined. The thought brought new light into the dying girl's eyes, and the frightened look faded away.

'You don't hate and despise me?' she whispered. 'I thought everybody did.'

Alison looked puzzled. 'Indeed I do not! why should I?'

'Haven't they told you?'

'They have only told me that you are ill and suffering. I want to know no more than that.'

'But——'

'Now, deary, be quiet,' interrupted Mrs. Ripon. 'Miss Wycherley is going to read the paper to you, and you must just lie still and listen.'

She held out a little crumpled paper, and Alison took it and opened it. It was a single sheet, printed in plain, large type on both sides. There was no heading, and wondering what it was, she began to read.

'By the side of a dusty, crowded road there was once a cool and pleasant garden. A high wall protected it from the inroads of strangers, and gave it security and safety. It was guarded and tended by the owner himself, who loved it with a great and tender love. He sheltered it from the blasts of the wintry winds, and from the scorching rays of the summer's sun, and watched day and night lest any evil should enter it, or any rough unfriendly hand touch his cherished flowers.

'There, in the shade of the spreading trees the lily of the valley opened her pure white bells and cast her fragrance round: and there her stately sister's queenly head was lifted

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high in fearless beauty. The little daisy's cheerful face looked up to the clear, blue sky, and the fuchsia's purple bells flushed radiantly in the golden light. Side by side with the rich exotic lived the dainty primrose and yellow cowslip; and fragile harebells nodded time to the music of the bees and birds.

'And near the wall there grew a sweet white rose. Day by day the master came and stood before it, watching with care its growing promise of beauty. Lest the noontide heat should prove too great, he caused the branches of a grand old tree to droop above it, casting a shadow on its opening petals; and the cool waters from the murmuring fountain were poured at eventide upon its roots. Everything was done to cherish its young life into perfection, and every day some new loveliness unfolded.

'At first the white rose was content with its fair home, and proud of its master's love. The sheltered garden was its world; it coveted no other. When its master's eye rested upon it in loving approbation, it was satisfied and glad, and cared not that without the garden a busy world pursued its way: it was nothing to it.

'But one day a whisper came to it of wondrous things: of marvellous beauties, and witching scenes, and it bowed its head and listened.

'"Beyond the wall is a fairer world than this: *there* your sweet fragrance and stainless petals would meet their due and be valued as they ought. The wall is high, but you can climb. Look, and judge for yourself."

'And the white rose took in the flattering words, and grew discontented with its lot.

'"Why am I kept behind this wall?" it murmured. "I would see this world of which I hear so much."

'"Hush!" said a gnarled old oak, looking down with pitying wonder. "Is it not enough that thou hast home and sunshine and love? What has the wide world to do with thee? Child, rest content in thy innocence and purity."

'But, alas! the wise words fell upon unheeding ears, and the white rose grew in silence, lifting its eyes to the lofty wall.

'And at last it reached the top, and gazed down upon the strange and ever varying scene. This then was the world of which it had heard, and it looked and wondered.

'The passers-by looked up and gazed with admiring eyes upon the perfect form and modest grace of the fair flower,

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and drank in with delight the sweet fragrance from its snowy petals.

'All was new and pleasant, and intoxicated with delight it listened to the flattering words. Lower and lower still bowed the listening head, and suddenly a ruthless hand was raised, the stem was snapped, and the white rose lost its place in its beautiful home.

'For one brief hour it was cherished and admired, and then the hand that held it prized it no more. Down into the dusty road it fell and lay unheeded in the noontide heat. The hot sun beat upon its unsheltered head; and rough feet trod upon its once snowy petals; all its sweet fragrance died away, and torn, withered, and discoloured it lay at the mercy of every passer-by.

'No one recognised in its shapeless form the once perfect flower which had so proudly challenged admiration. Lost and dying it lay panting for the cool shade and refreshing waters of its once dear home; but there was no hand to restore to it its lost happiness.

'But it was not forgotten: as it lay panting out its life, a gentle pitying hand gathered it up from the dust and dirt, and it knew its master's touch.

'Tenderly, yet sadly, he brushed off the torn and withered petals, and they fell amid the dust and were buried out of sight. And at last he reached the centre, and lo! he held in his hand the bruised and broken heart of the once fair flower. And stooping, he dipped it crushed and wounded in a fountain of crimson tide, and it flowed over it, washing away all clinging stain and dust, and the rose was white once more with a spotless purity.'

Alison looked up, and met the girl's eyes full of a wistful questioning.

'Is it true? Can the fountain do *that?*'

She was perplexed: could the fountain do what?

'It is only an allegory,' she answered, gently. 'It means——'

She stopped abruptly: what did it mean? Vague recollections of words almost forgotten flitted across her brain. Was it the Bible that spoke of a fountain filled with blood? Surely it was.

'It is in the Bible, you know,' she said, hesitatingly; 'it must be true.'

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'What does the Bible say?' came the eager, whispered words.

Alison looked appealingly at Mrs. Ripon. 'I forget,' she murmured. 'I forget the words.'

'"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Is that what you want, dear?'

'Does it mean the same?'

'Yes: it means just the same; it's the blood of Christ, you know, only in Mr. Lyon's paper it's called—what is it called, miss?'

'A fountain of crimson tide,' said Alison, mechanically, the depth of feeling strangely stirred.

'Ah yes, but it means the same,' said a voice behind her. She started, and turning round saw a cheery-faced old woman standing by her chair.

'Just the same,' continued the new comer, sitting down by the bed and smiling pleasantly at Alison; 'only put in a way, as you may say, to catch your fancy. Some folks read it in the Bible till they see no meaning in it, and it comes sort o' fresh in other words. But there's nothing like the real old Bible words for them as want them; is there, miss?'

Alison's face flushed as she answered, '*No.*'

'What is it now, Rose? what is the trouble, my child?' said the old woman, taking the thin hand in hers with motherly tenderness. 'Tell me what it is, my dear.'

'I can't seem to believe it's true for me,' whispered the dying girl, her eyes full of pathetic pleading. 'Something seems to say it isn't meant for me.'

'My dear, it's just for such as you it is meant. Why, the dear Lord Himself would tell you so if He was here.'

'I wish I could believe it! oh, I wish I could believe it!'

'That's how she keeps on,' whispered Mrs. Ripon; 'I wish you'd say something to her, Mrs. Willett.'

'Poor lamb!' said the old woman, tenderly, 'you don't suppose the Lord would ha' said it if it wasn't true. Not He! It's that old devil that says it isn't meant for you, and he knows better all the time. He's said the same to me, many a time.'

'And isn't it true?'

'Not a bit of it, my dear! You mustn't heed him; he's always ready to worrit if he sees folks ready to heed—and when they ain't too, for that matter. He's worrited me before now till I've been fain to drop on my knees and say, "Lord,

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speak to him, for he winna mind me." The Lord knows how to manage him, my child, so just you take it all to Him, and He'll see to it. The devil ain't going to have it all his own way, though maybe he'd like it. You're the Lord's child now, and He won't let more be put on you than you can bear; never you fear!'

The girl listened eagerly, the homely words evidently going to her heart. 'I *must* trust Him! there is no other chance!' she murmured. 'Dip me in that fountain, Lord!'

There was silence in the little room, and then Alison rose to go. She would have gone quietly, without disturbing Rose, but she opened her eyes and stretched out her hand with a wistful smile: 'Thank you kindly for reading, miss. It seems more real now. I think maybe the Master will lift me out of the dust.'

The last words were spoken dreamily, as if she were thinking aloud. Alison went out, followed by Mrs. Ripon.

'Has she seen a clergyman?' she asked, quietly, as she stood before the tiny fire. There was a keen east wind whistling in through the draughty door and window, and she shivered as she glanced round the bare little room.

'Yes; but he didn't seem to know how to speak to her; there's such a difference in folks. She doesn't want to see him again; he frightened her so.'

'How?'

'He began by asking her if she knew what a miserable sinner she was, and what a dreadful fate was awaiting her. He did his best, I know; but if he'd talked a bit kind first, he'd ha' found out without asking. She don't want no terrifying and frightening, don't Rose, poor child. She's just terrified and frightened to death as it is. Mr. Lyon, he's never said a hard word to her, though I've heard him say some queer things to other folks. He says we are only grown up children, and the timid ones want encouragement and the bold ones want checking, just as the little ones do.'

'The difficulty is to know which are which, at first sight, I suppose. The clergyman did not know Rose, and Mr. Lyon did.'

'Ah, but them as are used to that sort of thing ought to know at first sight, miss. A mistake once made may do a deal of harm.'

Thoughtful and saddened, Alison went home. She did not

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regret her visit, though it had in a measure justified her misgivings. She was conscious of being subject to a new and peculiar influence which she did not understand. Strange thoughts were rising up within her, and she felt perplexed and troubled. It seemed as if she were standing before a curtain which veiled some solemn secret from her gaze, and which she had not power to lift.

She had felt the same before in times past, but never so strongly as now. She tried to forget it, busying herself with the children, and listening to their ceaseless chatter.

'I like being here,' said Katie, 'it's nice. We have only bread for dinner at home, often. I don't like bread, do you, Miss Alis?'

It was a name the children had caught from Wilson's 'Miss Alison,' and they persisted in using it. She did not quite know what to answer. She liked bread well enough in its place, and as an accessory of other things; of its unaccompanied merits she had never had an opportunity of judging.

'We have dripping on it sometimes,' continued the little maid, who was in a confidential mood. 'Do you like dripping, Miss Alis?'

Worse and worse. Miss Wycherley had never, to her knowledge, tasted dripping, and scarcely knew what it was in appearance, not to mention flavour.

'I asked mother once if she wouldn't be *quite* happy if she had lots of nice things to eat, and she said *no*. She said she was happy with only bread, often,' said Katie, in a puzzled tone. 'Would you be *quite* happy, Miss Alis?'

'I am afraid not, dear,' she replied, absently. What was it that the poor hard-working woman had to give her happiness in her poverty? Was it the possession of a dull, lethargic contentment which received thankfully that which came to it, and asked no more? The vision of a pale, careworn face, lighted up with surprise and thankfulness, gave emphatic answer. No; there was no dull lethargy there.

'It is the old mystery. There is something in life which some people find and others do not,' she said to herself, sitting with clasped hands and dreamy eyes before the fire. 'I wonder what it is, and how they get it. It is not religion, because there are numbers of religious people who know nothing about it. Besides, very religious people are rarely happy, and these people are; that is what I cannot make out. They seem to

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carry it in their faces, too. Mrs. Ripon has it, and that old woman who came to see Rose.'

The name suggested a fresh train of thought. Whatever this secret was, Rose had not learned it; that was very evident. And yet she lived with those who had, and who would be no doubt willing to tell her all they knew. How was it?

'I suppose it is a sort of possession which each must seek and find for herself,' she thought. 'There is no sharing it with one's neighbours. I wonder if it would make me happy and contented if I had it. I don't believe it would. I believe it is a sort of philosophical resignation to one's circumstances which never could satisfy me.'

On going to her room that night, she found a folded paper on her table. It was the allegory she had read to Rose, and she wondered how it came there.

'I must have put it in my muff,' she thought. 'Wilson found it there, I daresay, and put it here. I hope that poor girl does not want it. How stupid of me to bring it away.'

She cast her eye over it, and noticed that there was no name attached. It was crumpled and worn at the folds, as if it had been often opened and read. She laid it down gently, thinking of the thin hands which had touched it with such care.

'She said Mr. Lyon gave it to her,' she mused. 'I wonder if he wrote it himself. I believe he did; wrote it on purpose for her, perhaps. It is a pretty allegory; I suppose it has some particular meaning; he is not the sort of man to write for mere amusement.'

The thought gave interest to the paper, and she took it up again, and read it carefully through, looking for its meaning.

But she did not hold the key, and all she saw was a general application to all who had in any way fallen from the path of honour. One thing struck her, and that was the *pity* which ran through it. There was not one harsh expression, not one hard word.

'And yet he looks so cold and stern. What a strange life his seems to be; so lonely, and, I should think, objectless. I wonder how he came to take up this curious hobby of visiting poor people. For want of something better to do, I suppose.'

It did not appear to her possible that anyone could deliberately choose such a life; being a stranger to the motive power, she naturally failed to understand the workings of such a nature as Lyon's.

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He called the next day, but she was out and did not see him.

'How annoying!' she exclaimed, when her father told her he had been. 'I wanted to see him so much. Did he come to see me, papa?'

'Yes; he said you had asked him to let you know something, I don't quite know what. He was sorry you were out—no, I don't mean that, for I do not think he was sorry, he did not seem to be.'

'Not he! Did he leave any message?'

'I told him I did not approve of your going to such places as Abbey-court, and as his visit was in connection with some similar place, he, of course, said no more.'

'Now, papa, that was too bad! I asked him to tell me how I could help some of those poor poverty-stricken people, and he came on purpose to do so; he promised he would,' cried Alison, vexed and annoyed. 'What will he think of me?'

'I do not see that it matters,' was the tranquil reply. 'It was my doing, not yours. He made no remark.'

'Of course he did not; but he thinks the more. I wish I had been at home.'

'I had no idea you had set your heart so much upon it,' said Mr. Wycherley, opening his eyes at his daughter's unusual display of annoyance. 'I asked him to come again when he had time, and he said he would, so you can ask him about it then.'

Alison said no more, but as she sat silently working, her thoughts were busy devising some method of letting Lyon know that it was still her wish to do something to make the world's weary burden a little less heavy. 'I can do something,' she thought, 'not much; but it is better to help one than none. It would be a miserable world if everyone were like me. If Elizabeth Fry's work had been left for me to do, I'm afraid it would have fared badly. What a good thing it is, that when there is a work to be done, there is sure to be someone to do it. I suppose there is nothing for me to do, or I should be doing it. Everyone fits his or her place, they say, and my part in life is a very insignificant one. Oh, dear me! I wish, when people had insignificant parts to play, they had insignificant minds and thoughts and wishes at the same time. I do not like insignificance, and I do not think it suits me.'

She laughed, half amused, half angry at the thought. Hers was not one of those cold-blooded, phlegmatic natures which

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are content to accept any paltry *rôle* assigned to them without a struggle for something grander. In her childhood's days she had always been dreaming beautiful impossible dreams of a heroic future. All her ideal men and women had been painted in the glowing colours of martyrdom or self-sacrifice, or deeds of daring. Grace Darling she had admired, but Florence Nightingale she had worshipped; and many a castle she had built, with herself the chief actor, taking prominent part in varied scenes of danger. She had grown out of this romantic age, but a scarcely defined wish to raise her life from its dead level had never left her. From the ordinary run of commonplace girls she had always held herself aloof; there was nothing in common between their minds and hers, and she had all the intolerance and impatience of youth towards the 'self-saturated young persons' who crossed her path.

'If I cannot make my life what I should like it to be, I can at least keep it from deteriorating into utter worthlessness and contemptibility,' she said proudly. 'It is worth an effort to keep my own self-respect, and I can do that, even though I fail to accomplish any of the dreams of my childhood. That must content me, I suppose.'

But she was finding out now that self-respect required more to keep it alive than she was giving it. A humiliating sense of her own uselessness in the world was rousing the old craving for something better than her old aspirations and aims, and she was of an age to *think* until her thoughts took action.

'I believe there is something for me to do,' she thought, growing restless in her dissatisfaction. 'I must make something of my life. I wish I knew what. I wish I knew how to begin. I wonder how other people who are really *living* got their inspiration. It is nothing short of inspiration.'

She was nearer the truth than she thought, for the words were spoken without any realization of their meaning. Nothing short of an inspiration can teach the secret of a grand life's work.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

LYON'S NEW WORK.

LYON left Mr. Wycherley's house with a slight sense of disappointment: he had hoped to interest Miss Wycherley in a woman whose need was very great, but who was out of his reach. A gentlewoman, poor and proud, resenting any interference or intrusion into the solitude of her lonely life. He had tried in various ways to help her, but she had repulsed him almost fiercely, and yet he could plainly see that she was slowly starving to death. No one knew much about her; she paid her rent, and that was enough for her landlord, and her neighbours she had driven away by her coldness and pride.

'What she wants is a friend, a woman of her own grade,' thought Lyon, after a few courteous words which had elicited a brief answer. He had met her on the stairs, for one of his patients lived in the same house, and he had been visiting him. She had replied to his words, but had hurried past and shut her door hastily, evidently fearing an intrusion.

'Sympathy from one able to understand her would be the best thing for her. I must find someone, or she will die from sheer starvation,' he said to himself as he left the house; and then he thought of his promise to Alison Wycherley.

He called, but was disappointed in his errand, and thrown again upon his own resources. He wondered what Alison would say when she returned and heard of his visit; whether she would feel relieved that she had escaped being taken at her word, and forced to keep a hastily made engagement, or whether she would be sorry.

'She can find ways and means if her wish be sincere,' he thought. 'She is not dependent upon me to show her what to do. I never yet knew anyone who was really able and willing to work unable to find that work.'

Dismissing the subject he mounted an omnibus, and taking

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out his pocket-book, was soon lost in calculations. As he entered his office a note was put in his hand from Mr. Chester, asking him to call on him that evening. As soon as he was at liberty, he went and found him waiting.

'Punctual as usual,' he said. 'Can you spare me this evening, Lyon?'

'Is it important?'

'If I say yes, will you come?'

'I must, I suppose,' replied Lyon. 'I know it must be something of real importance, or you would not ask for an evening. Your own time is too valuable.'

'Well, I think you will acknowledge that my business with you is of sufficient importance to warrant my taking you away for even a whole evening. I want you to come home with me,' said Mr. Chester.

His brougham was waiting at the door, and they entered and drove off. Little as Lyon cared for luxury, he could not but be struck by the beauty of Mr. Chester's home. His artistic eye, though uncultivated, was naturally correct, and the rich though quiet harmony of the surroundings suited his fastidious taste.

A lovely little girl, in white lace and blue ribbons, came running out to meet them, and without the slightest shyness held out her hand.

'Are you papa's friend Mr. Lyon?' she asked. 'He said he was going to bring you home to-night.'

'Yes, this is Mr. Lyon,' said her father, patting her head. 'Now, I suppose you will put him through a catechism. You must look out, Lyon; she is a warm partisan of yours, and has been plaguing my life out of me to bring her down to see your boys.'

'And I mean to come,' said the child, with pretty audacity. 'I am going to ask Mr. Lyon to show me some little girls who want dolls and toys; will you, Mr. Lyon?'

Chattering all the time, she led the way into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Chester was lying on a couch. She was an invalid, with the sweet, worn, patient face, peculiar to those who have been disciplined into a quiet submission, and Lyon felt drawn toward her. He could tell by the expression of her face, as she spoke of his work, that she had the subject at heart, that her questions were not dictated by mere politeness. Almost insensibly he found himself drawn into a conversation on the

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subject of his plans and schemes for the future. It was not often he spoke of them: it was not often he met anyone sufficiently interested in them to listen. But now he spoke freely, led on by the earnest attention of his hearers. The child stood by her father's chair, watching him with rapt eyes, and at a pause in the conversation crept to his side and put her little hand on his.

'Mr. Lyon,' she said, eagerly, 'when I'm grown up I'll help you to take care of the little children. I'm too little now to do much, but, oh! I wish I could help you. Can't I help you just a tiny bit?'

'Yes,' replied Lyon, looking down with the smile which always won the children's hearts. 'A little girl, no older than you, is helping me very much.'

'What does she do?'

'At Christmas-time she had a party, and invited all the little lame and blind girls and boys we could find. Such a party it was.'

'Did they play blind-man's-buff? Oh, no! they were lame, you say. Papa, may I have a party?'

'There, I knew that would be the next thing!' said Mr. Chester, laughing. 'I told you to look out, Lyon.'

'There are other ways of helping,' said Lyon. 'Shall I tell you a favourite saying of mine, little lady?'

'Yes; what?'

'"Where there's a will, there's a way."'

'What does it mean?'

'Come, Miss Chester,' said her father, rising; 'if I wait till you have finished talking I am afraid my business with Mr. Lyon will fare badly. Find out what it means; it is a riddle.'

'Is it?' asked the child, appealing to Lyon.

'To some people; not to you I think,' he answered. 'But if you cannot find it out someone will tell you.'

He followed Mr. Chester to his private room and waited silently for him to introduce the business in hand, which he did, abruptly.

'I want your help and advice, Lyon. I want to extend my business in a direction more familiar to you than to me, and you can tell me what I want to know. In the first place, do you think there is any probability of the large sale of cheap, attractive, and wholesome literature among the lowest classes if it be put in their way?'

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'Certainly there is—more than probability. I should say certainty.'

'So far, so good. In the second place, is it possible to secure literature exciting enough to attract and maintain interest without going into the revolting details of crime? Will boys read books containing little or no bloodshed, and destitute of daring burglaries and so on?'

'I think it is possible to get books that will attract. Of course incident and adventure are the most fascinating style of literature for boys; but they are not necessarily linked with crime. Heroism, audacity, daring, are the qualities most adored by boys, and surely these are not peculiar to villains.'

'It is to be hoped not! Well, seeing these are your views, I will tell you my plan. I want to organize a society for the spread of good literature among the lower classes of our large towns, London particularly. I want its operations to be actively aggressive, storming the enemy's citadel, taking the fortress by storm. Now, it is very easy to talk of all this, but the difficulty is to decide upon the first step. What should it be?'

Lyon pondered. 'Do you wish the society to be formed of voluntary workers, anyone who likes to come forward and offer his services; or do you wish its operations to be worked by a subordinate body of paid agents?'

'Nay, that I have not decided; I must talk it over. I want your opinion. Has the idea ever struck you?'

Lyon smiled as he took some papers from his pocket-book. 'If you want my opinion here it is,' he said, placing them on the table. 'It is a subject I have had at heart this long time. These are a rough draft of the necessary conditions; will you look at them?'

Mr. Chester drew up his chair. 'Umph! this is what you call a rough draft!' he said, glancing down the sheets. 'What is this map?'

'That is a plan of a district, showing the available resources. I have gone over it myself, and that is the result. But if you care to go into the whole scheme as I have worked it out, you must leave that for a bit, and begin here. I have commenced with the supposition of capital and a head, as you see. The first step is the formation of a committee, as I suppose it would be called. This I have taken from the active, influential, working laity of London; number indefinite, that is an after question, to be ruled by expediency. This is a map of London

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divided into squares; each square a district. They differ in size, owing to the different classes of inhabitants. This large one, for instance, is peopled chiefly by the upper classes; there is not much need of work there. This small one represents a district crowded with the lowest of the low, and so on. Over each district is appointed a—what shall I call it? A supervisor, who is head of a local working society, formed of voluntary workers.'

'You are sanguine, Lyon. Suppose there be no voluntary workers?'

'I have never yet seen a good work fail for want of them. I do not think I am over sanguine; my experience has taught me that when special circumstances call for special men, those men are to be found.'

'Well, go on. What is the plan of operation?'

'These local workers, under the supervision of their head, portion out the district, each taking a certain area to which they confine their operations. Of this they draw out a plan, marking down every shop where questionable literature is sold. Look at this plan, the one you first saw. All these black marks represent this class of shop; those few red ones represent the better sort, where only harmless literature is sold, and of which I think we can make use. Before we go any further I want to ask you a question. Do you look upon this as entirely a charitable scheme? You said you wished to extend your business; does that mean that you think it will pay its way?'

'I think perhaps it may pay its way in generations to come. Certainly not in our time, if we mean to do the thing thoroughly. What do you say?'

'I agree with you. The obstacles we have to overcome are too numerous to admit of profitable business sailing. If we mean to put down the present trade we must undersell it; there is no other way that I can see, and that will run away with some of the profit. I will go on from where I left off. Having made a list of these shops—most of them little paltry places—the next step is to become acquainted with the proprietors, and make a proposition to them, that if they will relinquish the sale of a certain class of literature we, the society, will provide them with attractive, cheap books on more liberal terms than they are at present able to buy. It is generally a question of profit with them, and if they find they can obtain

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marketable goods on terms advantageous to themselves they will do it.'

'And suppose they refuse?'

'Then set up an opposition shop. Vie with them in attractive and descriptive pictures, and undersell them. Of course it is idle to dream of extinguishing the trade, but I firmly believe, that with an active, well-organized body, possessed of time and money, it is more than possible to most materially check and lessen it. There are boys so vitiated and depraved that never—all their life long—will they lose their taste for the literature which, in all probability, has done much to form their habits of life and thought. But they are not the only ones to be thought of: the little ones are growing up, and Government has placed a dangerous weapon in their hands. Prevention is better than cure, and if we cannot effect the latter, the former is still in our hands.'

'Then what you propose really amounts to this—Take possession of established shops for our work if possible, and if not, raise an opposition. I suppose that is really the only way of grappling with the difficulty, but the work is something enormous.'

'The evil is enormous.'

'It is. But what do you propose doing with the stock in hand? All these shop-keepers have a stock, I suppose.'

'That is a difficulty. Of course it could be met by offering them fair exchange; but they would not take it, in all probability, and besides the outlay would be too great for such a risk. No; we might compromise it: agree with them to allow a certain time for the sale of their present stock: that might be done in some cases. But that is a question to be discussed. Some man may have the genius to hit upon the right thing.'

'Still, that only refers to the small shops; what about the larger businesses?'

'Even the larger ones are not blind to their own interest,' replied Lyon, with a smile. 'If they found it to their advantage to deal with us they would do it. But I have great faith in opposition. A large, wealthy society would stand a better chance than a single individual, unless his goods were really more marketable. That is the greatest difficulty of all.'

'To obtain literature equally attractive?'

'Yes; still it can be done.'

'I believe it can,' said Mr. Chester, in a tone of growing

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conviction. 'Of course, in this plan of yours, we should have to work our way cautiously, watching events.'

'Until all London was lying under the society's network.'

'Ah! I should glory in that, Lyon. It is something worth aiming at. Now I will tell you how far I got. In the first place, that it was necessary for someone to take the matter up; in the second, that that someone was myself; in the third, that unless a competent man were found to direct a new form of street literature, the whole thing would fall through. Now, I am prepared to do my part—to organize the society, or at least use all my influence to get the right men in, and I think I can do it. Money will be found, I have no doubt; but where is the man who has both will and ability to take upon himself the supervision and direction, the editorship, in fact, of the literary department?'

He bent forward and looked at Lyon, with his keen far-seeing eyes; but Lyon did not answer.

'I will tell you the sort of man we want,' he continued, 'and till he is found nothing can be done. A clear-headed, intelligent, shrewd man of business; one who understands the taste of the class for whom he works; who has had experience in their ways, and knows exactly what will suit his various readers. Can you tell me where I can find such a man?'

His tone and look were all significant, and still Lyon did not reply; he sat with his head resting on his hand, absorbed in thought.

Mr. Chester waited a while in silence, watching him with deep interest.

'You know whom I mean, Lyon,' he said, quietly. 'You are the man for the work.'

Lyon looked up. 'I know little of an editor's duties, Mr. Chester.'

'And I know little of a society's duties,' replied Mr. Chester. 'And yet I am going to learn, at my time of life, too! Now, Lyon, don't raise objections; you see as plainly as I do that this is the first step. Let me be able to say I have got the man for the most important post, and I shall have gained half the battle—if there be any battle. I tell you I do not feel inclined to take any further step till this is settled. I cannot undertake the duties myself; I have enough to do—besides, I am not the right one for it. It was you who suggested the thing to me, and if it be carried out you must have

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a large share of the responsibility. I do not want to hurry you into anything rash; but looking at it from every side of the question, it seems to me as clear as daylight that this is your place. Then, again, it will place you in a far more influential position. As sub-editor you will be able to reach people to whom you have now no access. Your means will not be so limited, and so you will be able to extend your present work among the boys. I have no doubt that this is the very place for you, and that you are the very man for the place. Don't let a false reticence keep you back.'

He spoke earnestly, evidently anxious for Lyon's reply. It came at last.

'If I hesitate it is because I distrust my own capabilities. The post you offer me is one of no little responsibility, and requires a better man than I.'

'Better in what way?'

'I am not what is commonly called an educated man,' replied Lyon, quietly.

'You will not be required to go to dancing parties and jabber French,' was the dry reply. 'That seems to be the sort of education you lack. You are not up in the accomplishments, I daresay.'

Lyon laughed. 'Well, I must think it over, Mr. Chester. It is no light matter to decide.'

'No, it is not; but if you will take my advice you will decide soon, and in the affirmative. Will you leave these plans with me? Mrs. Chester will like to see them.'

It was late when Lyon went home that night, for his plans were gone over in the drawing-room and discussed with interest by Mrs. Chester, who had evidently taken the matter up warmly.

'You will come again, Mr. Lyon,' she said, as he rose to leave. 'I am unable to get out much myself, but I feel great interest in the work you have taken up, and it will be a great pleasure to me to hear more of it. My little girl, too, is anxious to help you, and I should be glad for her to do so. I would never check a child's generous impulse, and it will do her good to think of others.'

'She has a sewing fit on now, and is making pinafores all day long,' said Mr. Chester, laughing. 'A little while ago she was dressing dolls. What has she done with them all, dear?'

'We sent them away to different places. Mr. Lyon is to have the pinafores.'

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'I can do with them,' he said, smiling; 'and anything else Miss Frida has to make. But they are little hands for work.'

'They will grow,' said Mr. Chester. 'I shall expect your answer soon, Lyon.'

It was not often that Lyon hesitated long over any matter left for his decision. But he felt that this was an important step, carrying with it a heavy weight of responsibility. He did not sleep much that night, and the morning found him still unable to see his way clear to the acceptance of the post. At noon there came a letter from Mr. Chester, containing a comprehensive account of the duties which would devolve upon him.

'I send it to enable you to see clearly what is before you,' he wrote. 'I myself will be your co-worker until you are competent to take the sole charge and responsibility.'

This made it easier for Lyon. He was not unduly self-depreciative, neither was he too much the reverse; but he had a certain amount of reluctance to rush into anything for which he was not fully persuaded he was fitted; though, at the same time, he had a sufficient quantity of self-reliance and self-confidence to enable him to form a correct judgment of his own capabilities and powers.

It was an important step, and as he pondered it he felt rising up within him the old ambition to make for himself a name and position. Mr. Chester knew what he was doing when he spoke of increased influence and widened opportunities; he touched a chord ever ready to vibrate.

'It is true,' thought Lyon, the question gradually settling itself. 'What right have I to shrink from a post which will so materially extend my influence?' It grew upon him with increasing force, as a plain indication of duty, and he was forced to acknowledge that he was, as Mr. Chester had said, the right man for the work. He felt within him a consciousness of power, which was a guarantee of its existence: unless he had felt this nothing would have induced him to accept the post. He was one of the men who rarely attempt what they cannot do; with him nothing was touched till he had worked up to it and found himself on its level. Step by step he had risen in mental force and capability, laying his hand upon some fresh enterprize as he found himself equal to the effort. What he could grasp this year had been beyond him last; where he had knowledge and power now he had ignorance and weakness

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then. His genius was a quiet, undemonstrative one, a latent power waking day by day into life and action. He felt that he was capable of greater things than he had hitherto attempted; but he had learned to wait, and had faith in the future.

'That which is assigned to me I must do,' he said. 'What I can do I know only by experience and inspiration. In this matter I have no experience: I must rely upon my own consciousness of power, and take it as inspiration. It has never failed me yet.'

This was one secret of his success; he rarely placed his shoulder to any wheel till he was sure of his strength. Nothing so hinders success as failure. One defeat crushes out the strength for many victories, and often marks its man for life.

'He tried, and failed, poor fellow,' says the world, with a shrug of its contemptuous shoulders; and unless the man be made of sterling stuff, he sinks back into his former obscurity, marked by a brand which is rarely forgiven, and still more rarely forgotten.

Lyon knew this; he knew that failure meant at best a pitying scorn; but he resolved to do and dare. He had the quiet, unegotistic self-confidence which characterizes the world's great workers, and without which success is impossible.

Having once made up his mind, he lost no time in writing to Mr. Chester, signifying his acceptance. It was a relief to have the matter settled, and he was glad to feel that it was finally decided.

He sent the letter, and received an immediate answer, appointing a time for an interview.

'He is the right man to take it up,' he thought; 'prompt and decisive; the work will not flag for want of energy in its head.'

And now there lay before him an untried future; he was entering a new sphere, undertaking fresh duties. One touch of sadness came over him as he thought of it—there was no one to whom it would bring pleasure. Reserved, self-repressed man as he was, he was not beyond all human weakness, and there were times when he would have given much for human sympathy and friendship. No man ever grows beyond the need of these.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOWER'S DAILY STRUGGLE.

IN a dreary back attic in a semi-respectable lodging-house in Battersea, Gower took up his abode. It was far from his last home, and was an entirely strange neighbourhood to him. He felt restlessly anxious to get away from the old scenes, and out of the reach of any of his former neighbours. That Winter had deserted him he had no doubt, and it was a sore point with him, strengthening his ill-feeling towards Lyon. For there was an ill-feeling: although at times he longed for the old friendship, he had moods in which he resented fiercely the supposed insult that had been offered him, and this bribing Winter away was but a fresh offence.

But this very resentment stood him in good stead. It roused all his dormant pride, and made him feel the more keenly his own degradation.

'Despised by *him!*' he said, pacing the room with his usual nervous, hurried tread. 'A man socially my inferior!'

'And morally your superior!' came the immediate answer. It was true: he could not gainsay it.

'The time shall come when I will own neither one nor the other!' he cried, with haughty determination, raising his head with somewhat of the old proud freedom. 'I have not lost all control over myself yet: I am still a free agent in this matter, and my future is in my own hands.'

Words easily spoken! he knew their fallacy while he uttered them. He knew that it was easy, while his brain was cool and the craving for drink in temporary abeyance, to boast of his free-agency and self-control. But what when the fatal drink-madness was on him? what, when his parched lips and trembling limbs made inexorable demand for their accustomed stimulant? when his burning brain was a torture, and *self-control* a vanished dream?

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'Nevertheless one more desperate trial!' he said, feverishly, wiping the drops of perspiration from his forehead. 'Others have conquered; why not I?'

Resolved to do his utmost for his own deliverance he buried himself in work. Experience had taught him that this was his greatest safeguard, and he clung to it desperately. In his nightly walk he carefully avoided the glaring taverns and gin-palaces, and chose the busiest and most crowded streets.

More than once he went to Lyon's reading-room and looked in its doors with considerable interest. The temptation to go in and have a chat with the old librarian, whom he knew, was sometimes great, but he did not yield. Any stranger seeing him during those few weeks would have had little clue to his real character. Most of his time he spent in his own room, writing and reading; and among the lodgers in the house he earned a reputation of quiet sobriety. They little knew the turmoil and passion which lay beneath the self-possessed exterior, nor guessed the fierce struggles which took place in the lonely garret.

He missed Robin, too, more than he had thought possible. For some time there was a lurking hope that he would turn up again, and resume his old place; but as days and weeks passed and he did not come, he gave him up, though not without regret. He felt some curiosity as to the means Lyon had used to detain him, and one night he strolled past the house, looking out for any one of the boys, intending to question him.

But they were holding carnival within. He could see the frequent shadows on the blind as the boys dashed to and fro, and could hear their merry shouts.

'No wonder Robin was tempted,' he thought. 'What boy would not be? Lyon is wise: he makes good good in itself, and not only in promise of consequence.'

And strange to say he turned from the house with renewed strength for his own conflict. There was some subtle influence at work which he did not then understand. At the end of the street, as he was turning the corner, a little lame boy ran against him and dropped his crutch. He recognised him as a boy he had once seen with Lyon, and stopped to speak.

'My little fellow, can you tell me who lives in that house with the light in the hall, where the shadows are crossing the window?'

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'That's our home,' replied the boy. 'Mr. Lyon and us live there.'

'And who are us, pray?'

'A lot of us boys: me and eleven more.'

'Oh yes, I think I've heard of it. Let me see, was it Wylie? no, Winter; a boy called Winter told me about it. He lives there, I think.'

'Winter? no, sir, he don't. I haven't seen him this long time.'

'Perhaps I've made a mistake: never mind. Good night.'

Dropping sixpence into the boy's hand he turned away with a bitter, sarcastic smile. 'I might have known better!' he said, scornfully. 'As if he would keep him within reach of my influence! Of course he is far enough away from me. I wish I could find out where he is. It would serve *him* right to fetch him back.'

By *him* he meant Lyon, and for the moment he felt almost tempted to search for the boy, and regain his old influence over him. But he soon put the idea aside: in the first place he did not know where to look, and in the second, down in his heart was a secret gladness that Robin was out of the peril of the streets.

'I should have ruined him,' he thought, 'and Lyon will save him. I give him up.'

At that moment he raised his head and saw before him the well-known glitter of lights. He stood still, a sudden rush of memory coming over him. On that very spot he had dashed away Lyon's hand, and within those doors had offered his coat for drink! Only a few months ago! it seemed like years.

He stood as if spell-bound by the vivid recollection of the past. A boy passing looked impudently up in his face.

'He wants to go in, but he's got no tin,' he sang, and a woman standing near laughed hoarsely.

'I had no tin,' she said, throwing back her rag of a shawl and displaying her bare arms and shoulders: 'I had no tin, but I got some. Ha, ha! drink is better than dress!'

With a gesture of disgust Gower drew back and let her pass, and then without a glance at the tavern, turned and hurried away. Not once did he pause till he had put miles between him and the spot so painfully suggestive. People glanced wonderingly at him as he walked swiftly on, with his hat drawn down to shade his eyes. There was about him, though

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he did not know it, a curious air of dogged determination which attracted the attention of more than one. A girl lounging at a corner darted forward as her eyes fell upon him.

'So! that's you, my gentleman, is it?' she exclaimed. 'You won't escape me as you did Rose. I'll soon find out where you live, sure as my name's Nancy.'

Keeping a safe distance behind him she followed him from street to street till he disappeared in a doorway. A woman came out immediately after, and Nancy went up to her and spoke.

'I say, where does Mr. Gower lodge?'

The woman stared at her. 'Never heerd such a name.'

'He lives in this house. I've seen him go in. Why, you passed him on the stairs!'

'Oh him!' cried the woman. 'He may be Gower for aught I know, but he calls hisself Smith. He lives up top. Do you want him?'

At that moment he came out again, and passing close by the lamp went up the street.

'Lives!' cried free Nancy. 'Seems more like *dies!* Do you know him?'

'Not I! he keeps hisself to hisself. He do look bad.'

'He's off to kingdom come, sure enough!' was the flippant reply. 'That's news for Mr. Lyon.'

She stayed chatting with all the freedom of her class till Gower came back, bearing in his hands some small parcels. Unconscious of the scrutiny to which he was being subjected, he passed close by them and went upstairs.

'Umph! coffee and sugar! no brandy!' said Nancy, as he disappeared. 'He's signed the pledge.'

'He don't drink,' said her new acquaintance. 'He's very quiet.'

'He'll be quieter before long! that's my opinion. Good-night.'

Turning away as unceremoniously as she had stopped, Nancy walked off.

Her surmise was correct; the parcels did contain coffee and sugar, for this was the drink Gower had fallen back upon. Morning, noon, and night he drank the strong decoction, and now could not work without it.

Little suspecting that a swift messenger was carrying the news of his whereabouts to Lyon, he made up his fire and sat

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down to work. But his brain refused to spin the continuous thread of incident which he was working into his serial, and at last he threw the pen away impatiently and turned to the cheerful blaze.

'Temptation resisted is strength increased,' he said aloud, dropping his head wearily on his hand. 'It need be! I shall want my strength. How long is this to go on?' He was thinking of the daily struggle and constant strain; of the ceaseless dread and ever haunting fear. Life was a terrible thing to him then: it meant but a long vigil, an endless watch over a slumbering foe, which might any moment rise into a fearful activity. He shrank from himself: with indescribable dread he thought of the possible future and could have cried out for help against himself.

But to whom could he cry? The question suggested itself, but not the answer. With a sigh he took up a book and opened it listlessly.

"There are no fixtures to men, if we appeal to consciousness. Every man supposes himself not to be fully understood; and if there is any truth in him, if he rests at last on the divine soul, I do not see how he can be otherwise. The last chamber, the last closet, he must feel was never opened, there is always a residuum unknown, unanalysable. That is, every man believes that he has a greater possibility."

One idea suggests another: the end of everything is the commencement of something else: each avenue of thought leads into another avenue of thought.

The book fell from Gower's listless hand, and he fell into a reverie. What was the limit of his possibilities?

There came to him the recollection of a dream. He saw a towering mountain top, stretching away to the distant skies, and heard a well-known voice saying, 'It is better to climb than to fall.'

'And the mountain top is attainable,' he mused; 'though it seems to reach to heaven. Is that the limit?'

"There is no boundary to a man's life but the boundless: he steps from the finite to the infinite. All things are possible to him who has faith and courage."

The old familiar words came with a sudden rush, like the memory of a once dear friend. And with them ringing in his ears he laid his head on the pillow that night, with a courage and hope to which he had long been a stranger.

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Meanwhile Winter was wandering the streets of Birmingham, looking in vain for his lost master. He found much to interest and amuse him, and was by no means unhappy, though he was dissatisfied. The men, and especially Forset, were kind enough to him, and made a sort of pet of him. It was his business to sing to them and their companions at night, for curiously enough, brutalised as they were, they were capable of appreciating his beautiful voice. It was very much like his life in London, and had it not been for that one thing he would have been contented enough. But like a shadow over him lay the thought, '*He* will think I have deserted him.'

However, it is not in a boy's nature to think long on one subject, and this shadow only affected him at times, though he never relinquished his search. He obtained plenty of money by various means; chiefly by singing at sing-songs, as the low public-house concerts were called. The greater part of his earnings he gave to Forset for his board, and as this went to the general fund it was no wonder the men made much of him: he was a small ready-made fortune.

The boy himself cared little for money; the thought of the future rarely troubled him: his life lay in the present. Among his new boy companions he was soon a leader, heading a party, or faction, and holding unbounded sway. His audacity and daring charmed and delighted, while his generosity gave him a hold upon them. Boys greatly admire this quality in others.

But he had never been quite well since that day in the London fog: often a faint, queer sensation forced him to leave his occupation, whatever it might be, and seek out some quiet spot where he could rest his head and shut his eyes till the strange feeling had passed away. One night he woke with a painful start, and sprang out of bed imagining he heard Gower call him. There were voices in the outer room, and he caught his own name, uttered in loud and angry tones.

'Hush,' said a warning voice. 'You'll wake him.'

'I don't care if I do! wot's the use of bringing him down here if we don't use him? tell me that.'

All awake now, Winter crept near the door and listened. If they were going to make use of him he might as well know how at once: surely no one had a greater right.

'It's a risk,' said Forset, quietly. 'I tell you he ain't fit for it. S'pose he funks at the last.'

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A muttered oath from the other boded ill for the lad under such circumstances.

'I've seen him turn queer lately several times, and it's my belief he's going to die. I wouldn't ha' brought him if I'd known.'

'He seems a sharp lad,' observed a fresh voice.

'So he is: just the lad for us if he was well, which he ain't.'

'I said as how you ought'er 'ave brought your own boy: there's nothing like one's own flesh and blood for work o' this sort. This one ain't no count.'

'I promised Mr. Lyon I'd leave Sam alone,' replied Forset, with rising anger. 'I'll give the boy a chance of being an honest man at any rate. You shut up about it!'

A quarrel seemed impending, but the others interfered and quieted them, and the conversation turned to another subject.

Winter strained his ears but could not catch more than disjointed sentences. These, however, were full of meaning, and he listened with intense eagerness. They were evidently planning some deed of daring, and his ears tingled with excitement. His imagination conjured up visions of lonely country houses besieged by burglars, of crape masks, of noiseless slippers, and his blood ran chill with a sudden horror. Was he really on the eve of a startling adventure? would they give him a pistol and cover his face with a crape mask, and hoist him in a window to unlock the door?

His heart beat loud and fast, as he pictured himself stealing along the lofty corridors at midnight. They were all lofty corridors or stately halls in the books he had read.

'I'm not ill,' he thought, as he crept back to bed, after vainly trying to hear more. 'I'm quite well. I shan't funk!'

He felt unutterable contempt for the very thought, and angry with Forset for deeming such a thing possible.

'I'll show him,' he thought confidently. 'Jest let them try me; that's all.'

Very little sleep did he have after that: he lay tossing restlessly till morning light, and was glad to get up. All that day he was on the *qui vive*, expecting Forset to speak to him; but the man kept, on the important subject at least, a most aggravating silence.

Too excited to care about his ordinary occupations he loitered about the house, reading in one of his favourite books accounts of various burglary adventures, which fired his ambition. He revelled in the daring exploits and thrilling incidents, and

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wondered much if Forset would provide him with wadding slippers covered with silk, and a crape mask, such as were worn by the hero of his fearfully instructive novel.

It did strike him that Forset and the other men were very different from the picturesque ruffians there idealized into heroes: but he did not stop to think much about them. He was his own hero here: the adventure was to be his, in which he was to cover himself with glory and renown. As he sat reading by the firelight Forset came in and threw himself into a chair with a muttered exclamation of anger.

'What's the matter?' said the boy.

'Nothin': wot have you got there? anything worth listening to?'

'I'll read it if you like,' returned Winter, eagerly seizing the opportunity of introducing the subject. 'It's jolly! all about a burglary.'

Forset looked up sharply and scrutinised his face with keen, suspicious eyes. 'Fire away,' he said, apparently satisfied. 'Never mind the beginning: go on from where you are.'

'They're just in the house, you know,' said Winter, bending over the book. 'I'll begin here:—

"As soon as they were inside, Blake lighted a dark lantern, and cautiously looked about him.

"All was well!

"Beckoning Jack to come in silently, he closed the door; and again having recourse to the bag of tools, he took therefrom a couple of pairs of slippers.

"These were of wadding, covered with silk, and made large enough to fit over the ordinary boots.

"Of course, when they were on, their footsteps would be inaudible.

"Blueskin handed a pair to Jack, and motioned to him to put them on.

"This done, the next things he produced were two masks of black crape, which were sewn up into folds. When the one which was given to him was on, Jack found that he could see through it with considerable distinctness, but Blueskin's face was perfectly invisible.

"This, then, was an effectual precaution against their faces being recognised, if they should happen to be discovered. But Blueskin was so expert that this scarcely ever happened

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to him, yet, for all that, he never failed to provide against contingencies.

"Having now effected an entrance, and made all their preparations, it remained, of course, for them to secure their booty as speedily as possible, and decamp.

"Accordingly Blueskin unfastened the door leading from this kitchen into the interior of the dwelling, and passed through it.

"They then found themselves on a square landing, from which ascended two steps leading to the principal or entrance hall of the mansion." '

The sudden opening of the door made the boy start and look nervously up.

'Wot's the matter?' said Forset, looking at him angrily. Wot d'ye want to jump like that for? one 'ud think you'd seen a ghost.'

Winter hung his head ashamed, and would have gone on reading, but a mist floated before his eyes, and a strange noise sounded in his ears. The room began to move round, and in another moment he was lying on the ground at Forset's feet.

When he came to himself again he was lying on his bed alone in the dark. He lay for some time thinking, wondering what was the matter with him, and why those queer feelings would come over him at times. Then he remembered what he had been doing, and with a pang of regret thought that perhaps his chance of an adventure was gone: Forset would be more persuaded than ever that he was not fit for it.

He could hear the men talking in the next room, but the door was shut. Quietly, trembling with weakness and excitement, he stole off the bed and put his ear to the keyhole. Yes: they were talking about him.

'Fainted, you say?'

'Dead as a door nail.'

'He's in there?'

'Yes: there's no fear of his listening, if that's wot you're thinking of: besides the door's shut tight.'

'I knew he'd never do. The best thing you can do is to pack him back to London; he's too sharp to please me. He'd blow the whole plot if he'd a mind.'

'Not he! you should ha' seen him to-night reading about

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a flash burglary: his face told tales if ever a face did. He's up for anything. However it's no use talking; he's too ill. We must find another his size.'

'I can't think however he come to take in that tale of yourn, Forset: it beats me, when he's so sharp.'

'What tale?' asked another voice.

'Little chap had a friend somewhere, and wanted to go to him. Forset here said he'd go and fetch him, and came back with the tale that he'd gone to Birmingham. Blest if I thought he'd believe it, but he did! took it all in!'

'And it wor all a tale?'

'Every bit on't.'

The men laughed at what to them was a good joke, but little Winter's face grew hot with fierce indignation.

'It was all a lie then!' he thought, drawing in his breath, and compressing his lips. 'He never came to Birmingham at all, and he's in London and thinks I've run away from him!'

One of the men came towards the door, and he had only time to spring back to the bed before he entered with a light. Coming to the bedside he bent down and steadily looked into the handsome little face. For a minute the boy bore the scrutiny, but was not equal to the effort long, and with the intuition that it would be better to confess himself awake than be found out feigning sleep, opened his eye and looked up.

'Better?' said Forset, gruffly.

'Yes: is it morning?'

'Not yet. I'll tell you wot you'd better do, young man: get back to yer friends if you've got any, or else go to the hospital.'

'I'm not ill,' said Winter, defiantly.

'Oh no! of course not,' was the sarcastic reply. 'Ill folks don't go tumbling about in a dead faint. It's well folks as does that. Don't be a little fool, Winter; you are ill, and you'll be worse if yer don't mind. I'll get someone to take you to a hospital.'

'I won't go! I'll go back to London first.'

'Why don't you?' said the man, who evidently was anxious to get rid of him, now that he was not likely to be of service to him. 'Go back to yer friends and get nussed up a bit; that'll set you right.'

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'I haven't got any friends,' was the dogged reply.
'You know Mr. Lyon, don't you? go to him.'
'I won't!' he said, angrily.
'Well go somewhere else then. I'll pay yer fare.'
Drawing the rug over his head the boy made no reply; Forset went back to his companions, and they all went out.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

TWO or three days after her visit to Abbey-court Alison persuaded her father to take her to Covent-garden market. It was a place she had often wished to see, and the bright, warm morning was very tempting.

As they walked through the market, gazing round with the interest so conspicuous in those to whom such scenes are new, Alison's eye suddenly fell upon John Lyon.

He was standing with his back to them, holding in his hand a single pure white, half-opened rose.

'Papa, there is Mr. Lyon,' she cried, astonished to see him in such a place. Nor was her father less astonished.

'I don't know how it is,' he said quaintly, 'but meeting a face we know in London seems to us such an extraordinary event.'

He spoke the words to Lyon, who, turning round, suddenly faced them.

'You probably do not know many people in London,' he replied, raising his hat with a courtesy and ease at which Alison marvelled. 'We are fated to meet, Miss Wycherley.'

'It is the last place in which I should have expected to see you,' continued Mr. Wycherley. 'I thought you were one of the traditional city men, immersed in business.'

'So I am, but my work often enables me to take these refreshments by the way. This is one of my favourite haunts; it takes one out of the city din and toil.'

'Flowers are very beautiful,' said Alison, for with his last words he had turned towards her. 'Your choice is most lovely. Papa, did you ever see such a perfect white rose?'

'Beautiful indeed! I suppose a flower is something of a rarity to you city men.'

Mr. Wycherley had very vague ideas on the subject of city

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men, who seemed to him an almost distinct species of the genus homo.

'Not to me,' replied Lyon, with a slight smile. 'But my acquaintance with them is not so personal as with ferns and mosses. How are the little girls, Miss Wycherley?'

'Quite well, and very happy, I believe. They make the house so noisy! I do not know what we shall do when they are gone. I am sorry I was out when you called. I wanted to see you. Will you tell me now who it is you wish me to help; that is what you came for, I know.'

'I wanted a lady's help, and you were the only one I knew who could give it,' replied Lyon, with a quick, searching glance which told him that her words were true. 'But as Mr. Wycherley does not approve of your visiting such places, I will try to find someone to do the work.'

'I do not object if she wishes it. I believe I can rely upon you to take her, or rather send her, to no unsuitable places.'

'To the best of my knowledge the person in whom I wish to interest Miss Wycherley is a lady herself. You will pardon me if I leave you: my time is precious this morning, but if you will allow me I will seize an early opportunity to tell you all I know.'

He waited for an answer, which Alison gave cordially, and then he turned away, but came back again.

'You may not have heard—I suppose you have not: Rose died this morning. May I thank you for all your kindnesses to her, and especially for one?'

Startled and shocked she looked up into the dark, grave eyes. 'I did not know. I did not think it was so near! Oh, I wish I had known in time, Mr. Lyon. Why did you not tell me?'

'I do not think I could have told you in time,' he answered, evidently surprised at her emotion. 'But I will not err in like way again. I shall see Mrs. Ripon to-night; do you wish to send any message?'

'Only that I will gladly keep the children as long as she likes; they are no trouble. And I should like to see her too, if she will come up.'

'She shall come and fetch the children home; I will see to it. The change will do her good.'

The poor little woman sorely needed change and rest: she was worn out with watching and nursing. She came up to

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see the children, and spent the day with them, but Alison would not let her take them back then.

'There is plenty of time,' she said, 'and you are not fit for the charge. Wait a few days longer.'

They were in the cheerful little breakfast-room, the children out for a walk with Jane. All restraint had worn off, and Mrs. Ripon spoke freely of herself and those belonging to her. She spoke of Rose, and told how quiet had been the falling asleep.

'For it was just that, miss,' she said. 'All the trouble was taken away and she lay there as quiet and peaceful as a baby. She only had one wish, she said, and that was to have a white rose in her hand when she was buried, and Mr. Lyon he promised she should. Sick folks do take queer fancies sometimes. I think that piece you read to her seemed to get a hold on her mind, and quiet her: she wasn't the same after.'

'But it was only an allegory,' said Alison, wonderingly.

'Ah, yes, miss, but it was the meaning she saw, through the words like.'

It sounded very strange to Alison: what possible power was there in that simple allegory to effect such a change? 'It is part of the mystery! I wonder if Mrs. Ripon can tell me what it means.'

She looked at the tired, wan face, with its underlying expression of restfulness, and the impulse to speak became strong.

'Mrs. Ripon, with all your troubles and cares you are happy; how is it?'

'It's just because I know He lets the trouble come for some good purpose of His own: it don't come of its own accord.'

'But does not the devil send trouble?' suggested Alison, whose theology taught her to regard all evil as emanating from one source. 'He is the father of all evil, you know.'

Mrs. Ripon looked puzzled: there was no denying the fact, and it seemed to contradict her former theory. Alison watched her, somewhat amused at her evident perplexity.

'I am not rightly sure, miss,' said the little woman at last: 'perhaps the devil do send all the trouble: I can't say. But anyhow, miss, he's only God's agent, so to speak: he ain't allowed to touch us more than God sees fit, so it comes to the same.'

'But how do you know God takes any notice?'

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'Well, where's the good of being His children if He don't look after us? It's that that makes us happy, isn't it, miss?'

Alison made no reply; this simple, unquestioning faith was beyond her comprehension. Many a time that day and afterwards the words returned to her, and she pondered them over, but could not understand them.

The next day she received a letter from Lyon. He apologized for writing, but said he could not possibly call, and the case was one not admitting delay. Then he gave full particulars, and she read in dismay.

'Oh dear! I am in for something now!' she said, with half-laughing consternation. 'It is too bad of Mr. Lyon to give me such a thing as this to do. I won't go!'

But as she thought it over she changed her mind. There was something of adventure and novelty in it, and she rather liked the idea of trying her powers of persuasion and forcing this poor woman to admit her to her home and confidence.

'I offer one suggestion and then leave the matter entirely in your hands,' wrote Lyon. 'She has taken in plain sewing, and you might make this your excuse for calling. Without some plausible excuse I am afraid you will not gain admittance.'

Resolved to lose no time she set out at once, taking Wilson with her. The place was easily found, and her heart failed her as she knocked at the door. But she gathered courage when she saw the white, pinched face of the woman; there was such evident need of help. In a few words she introduced her errand. Had heard of her as a needlewoman; had some plain work on hand; would she undertake it? And then with what she considered a crowning stroke of diplomacy added—'But I am not prepared to give a high price: I hope your charge is reasonable.'

The look of suspicion on the woman's face certainly faded away on hearing these words, and she opened the door wider for her to walk in.

Such a bare, wretched room Alison had never seen: Mrs. Ripon's was luxurious in comparison. She sat down very cautiously on the only chair, for it did not look at all safe. The woman stood in front of her with hard, set face, and hands folded tightly. 'Yes,' she said doggedly, 'I do plain sewing, and I do it cheaply. I daresay my terms will suit you.'

Both face and manner were so repellent that Alison wished herself away. She began to feel a little bit frightened too:

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suppose she were to begin to abuse her, as poor people sometimes did those better off than themselves. Fortunately she had taken the precaution to carry some work with her, and hastily opening her bag she took it out, and began to talk in as cold a business tone as she could assume.

The question of terms was soon settled, for she merely acquiesced when Mrs. Freeman asked if she were willing to pay a sum so ridiculously small that it was as much as she could do to refrain from doubling it on the spot. But that would have spoilt it all; so saying that the charge was moderate enough to suit her, she rose to go. She could think of nothing else to say, and she was evidently expected to leave, now that the business was settled. Taking out her purse she offered to pay the amount beforehand, and instantly Mrs. Freeman's face grew dark with suspicion. Poor Alison saw she had made a mistake.

'I beg your pardon!' she exclaimed, in confusion, angry with herself. 'I thought, perhaps, it might be a convenience to you. I did not mean to say anything to—to annoy you.'

She was making matters worse. Mrs. Freeman drew herself up proudly and opened the door. 'When the work is finished, I will bring it to you and receive the money,' she said, with a ceremonious bow. 'It is not customary to pay beforehand.'

'Failure number one,' thought Alison, as she went down the narrow stairs. 'I don't care! I will not be beaten.'

She was beginning to feel roused and interested, and the woman's friendless, destitute condition excited her pity and commiseration. One thing she hoped, and that was that Lyon would not call before she had more success. She did not feel at all inclined to tell him that she had failed in her object. That he had asked her to do what he could not do himself had gratified her, and her pride rebelled against acknowledging her inability to perform so apparently simple a service.

After he had sent the letter Lyon felt some compunction. It might prove no easy thing that he had asked her to do; the woman might treat her as he had sometimes seen ladies treated by those soured by poverty and distress. He was almost sorry he had asked her, and yet he felt that she was the very one for the work, requiring, as it did, the graceful tact of an innate refinement.

Many a time that day he wondered with what success she had met, for little as he knew of her, his discernment had told

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him that she was not one to linger or delay over work once undertaken. He read her better than she knew; he had heard of her from Rose, who had spoken with loving gratitude of her gentle words, and the pitying touch of her hand; and he had heard of her from Mrs. Ripon, and from the children, who never wearied of her name. This, coupled with his own keen observation, had led him to form a tolerably correct idea of her character, and in sending her to this place, he felt that as far as Mrs. Freeman was concerned he was making no mistake. His own time was fully occupied; scarcely a minute in the day was at leisure.

Mr. Chester sent for him repeatedly for consultation or advice. He was taking up the new scheme with an energy which augured well for its success, and in a very short time had a list of influential names down as a commencing committee.

'Representative men,' he said to Lyon. 'I have gone to work systematically, and taken them from various classes. Here are your political men: members but not *too* busy ones: I knew better than that. I don't believe that an active, absorbed politician is the best for private work: the one thing must interfere with the other. I may be mistaken, but I have acted upon that idea, and my men have leisure to take this up. Then here are your city magnates; well-known influential merchants: they have money too. Here are the literary men, and here, men who are already recognised workers, and so on. I think we shall do. I want you to meet them all: they are coming to dine with me next week, and I rely upon you to be there.'

'I have never been to a dinner party in my life,' said Lyon, 'except indeed in very different company from this.'

'Well, you will have to go into society more now, so you may as well begin at my house. I cannot understand how it is you have kept yourself out of the world so long. Do not do injustice to yourself in doing kindness to others.'

'It has not been exactly a matter of choice in the past.'

'Well, it is now. Remember, position gives influence, and influence is another name for power.'

'Why do you say that to me?'

'Because from my knowledge of you I am persuaded that I could not use a more potent argument.'

Lyon laughed: he knew the words were true: he did wish for power and influence.

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As he went home that night a girl, who was evidently in wait for him, stepped forward and spoke.

'Well, Mr. Lyon, it's a precious long time since we met.'

'It is. Where have you been, Nancy?'

She gave a short laugh. 'To a place where I'm always welcome,' she said, airily. 'A sort of second home you may say, where they always keep the door open for me.'

'To go in: not to come out.'

'No! that's the bother; they're a little too fond of me for my liking. So *she's* gone at last?'

The emphasis on the *she* told him that she spoke of Rose. He was silent for a moment, and then turned towards her with searching eyes.

'Nancy, I want to ask you a question: will you answer it?'

'I'll answer it: I won't say how!'

'Are you glad now, or sorry, that I prevented you from taking Rose into that tavern the first night I ever saw her?'

The girl grew fidgety and sullen, as he waited silently for her answer. 'It don't matter,' she muttered.

'But I wish to know. Tell me, Nancy.'

'Well then, I'm glad for her sake, of course: but it don't matter to me.'

'Have you seen Mrs. Ripon?'

'Yes: I went up to see her, and Mrs. Ripon told me. Look you here, Mr. Lyon, I don't want you to preach at me. I know what you are going to say, and of course it is better you took her out of my clutches and made a Christian of her afore she died. I ain't such a soft as to deny that: but I don't want no sermonising about it. I was fond of Rose, and I'm sorry she's gone, but what's the use of bothering? It's for her sake I'm here now.'

She paused a moment, but Lyon did not speak, and she went on, speaking rapidly.

'She'd set her heart on finding that Gower man you saved at the fire. That's how she caught the cold that sent her off, following him about the streets at night.'

'What did she do?' said Lyon, quickly.

'Followed that Gower miles and miles away one bitter cold night, and then lost him in a crowd. I've found him, come across him by accident, and I came to tell her. However, there's no telling her, so I thought I'd best do as she'd have done, and tell you.'

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'Thank you, Nancy. I did not think Rose knew anything about him.'

'She knew that you wanted him. He's living down Battersea way; such living as it is. I thought I'd just ask a few questions about my gentleman, and while I was talking to a woman, up he comes. He's as thin as a match, and looks as if he'd learned to live without eating. If you don't look after him pretty soon there'll be nothing left to find.'

The tone was flippant in the extreme, but Lyon understood the girl. Having accomplished her errand she turned to leave him, but he stopped her.

'Hasn't the time come yet, Nancy?'

She knew what he meant, and her face hardened; but he looked down upon her with such kindly, pitying eyes that the hardness faded away, and her lips slightly quivered.

'It's no use!' she said, and then a stifled sob checked the words, and she fled down the street.

Buried in thought, Lyon walked slowly home. The news she brought him troubled him, and he could not determine what to do. His own pride, for he had more than people thought, and the recollection of Gower's, made him hesitate to seek one who had so persistently shunned him. And yet he could not rest content knowing no more than the girl had told him. He pictured Gower ill, even dying, alone and uncared for, and he shrank with pain from the conjurings of his own imagination. But it was not all imagination: he knew Nancy had not exaggerated, and that her eyes were quick to detect the truth. While he was pondering the question he suddenly remembered that he did not know his whereabouts: Battersea was such a very vague, indefinite direction, and until he saw Nancy again the matter was still out of his hands. But the next day an envelope was left at his door containing the exact address, and it only remained for him to decide his course of action. This was no easy thing to do. Gower was different from the men he usually mixed with and influenced: with him he felt on an equality, and it was difficult to overcome a natural feeling of wounded pride. All day long he hesitated, unable to resolve what to do: but towards evening his mind gradually determined what plan to pursue. He would make this one effort, he would do his utmost to re-establish the old familiar terms. If he were repulsed—well, failure was better than self-reproach.

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He lost no time, but went that night. In answer to his knock the well-known voice said 'Come in,' and he opened the door.

Gower was seated at the table, and on seeing him rose to his feet, his face darkening. All that evening he had been brooding over the past, and his resentment had risen hot and strong. He had recalled that rejected—scornfully rejected appeal to Lyon for help, and his indignation was all the greater that it was silent. And while his anger was at its height the door opened, and Lyon appeared. Had he come to heap further insult upon him? to taunt him with his need, and perhaps offer him *charity!*

In his wrath he rose, unheeding the outstretched hand.

'To what am I indebted for this intrusion?' he demanded, with all the old hauteur of manner, and Lyon's hand dropped.

'Is a friend's visit to a friend then deemed an intrusion?'

'No.'

'Then I do not understand you, Gower.'

'I daresay not,' came the sarcastic reply. 'It is scarcely to be expected.'

'Do not mistake me,' said Lyon, coldly. 'I understand perfectly that you deny my claim to the name of a friend. What I do not understand is your reason for so doing. Is an explanation too much to ask, Gower?'

His tone involuntarily softened, and Gower looked at him doubtfully.

'The last time we met,' continued Lyon, 'I made a mistake: taken off my guard I did what perhaps I had no right to do. For this I now apologize. I would have done so long ago if you had given me opportunity. Do you accept my apology?'

No reference to that insulting message, sent in his time of bitter humiliation! Did he think *that* was to be passed over, unmentioned, unremembered?

'Your apology! When it is made I will think of accepting it!'

'I make it now.'

'For kindly causing the loss of a glass of brandy! That may content you, but not me, Mr. Lyon.'

Lyon's thoughts went rapidly back to the past: but beyond that one episode he could recall nothing which warranted such words. His face told his bewilderment, but to Gower's prejudiced eyes it was but a piece of acting.

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'Your memory is convenient,' he cried, mockingly. 'Your little friend, Winter, can probably enlighten you.'

There flashed across Lyon's mind the recollection of an insolent little face with the gas-light full upon it, and what he had taken to be a fabricated message purporting to come from Gower, and he felt more puzzled than ever. What was the connection between the two?

'What has Winter to do with it?' he asked in surprise. 'True, he brought me a message once from you, but I thought it was a fabrication of his own. You surely did not resent so small a thing as that, Gower.'

'Small a thing!' he echoed, and then stopped short. 'Yes,' he continued, in the mocking tone Lyon disliked so much, 'it was a small thing! I grant it. Too small to retain any place in *your* memory! it had almost escaped mine! Pray do not trouble to recall it.'

'It was a small thing,' said Lyon, steadily. 'I cannot think that you will allow it to stand in the way of our renewed friendship. I believed the message to be a fabrication: can I say more? I knew the boy's character.'

Gower's wrath rose high, and the hot blood mounted to his face. Believed it to be a fabrication, when it was in his handwriting, signed with his initials! It was impossible, and at that moment he felt a genuine contempt for the man who could stand before him with such a lie on his lips.

Lyon saw the unveiled contempt, and it stung him to the quick. Compressing his lips he made one more attempt to break down the barrier.

'I have never yet given you occasion to doubt my word, Gower, and I ask you to believe it now. I can give no proof; I have only my word, but it is my bond. On my honour, I tell you that I believed that message was made up by Winter for the sole purpose of annoying me. Will you believe it?'

He stood erect, with quiet dignity, honour, and truth stamped upon his face. Gower gazed at him for a minute in silence, and then broke out fiercely, with an oath,—

'No, I will not believe it! Will you leave this room, or must I?'

Lyon hesitated one moment, then silently bowed and left the room. It was a bitter disappointment to him, but there was no help for it then. He saw that he had come at an

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inopportune time, and that further words would but increase the breach between them.

'I am afraid it is hopeless,' he thought, his brow contracting. 'He is evidently determined to have nothing more to do with me, and makes that trivial thing an excuse.'

As the sound of his footsteps died away, Gower sat down, and folding his arms gazed moodily into the fire.

'The die is cast!' he murmured. 'I have alienated him for ever. What do I care? is the friendship of such a man worth having? I despise him. And yet I could have staked my life upon his truth!'

It never once occurred to his mind that they were playing at cross purposes, *or* that Robin had played him false. No: it was easier to condemn the man whose whole life was a service of honour and truth. So blind and bitter is prejudice.

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CHAPTER XXX.

'NO ONE CAN DESPISE HIM.'

'I MET some friends of yours last night, Lyon,' said Mr. Chester. It was two or three nights after the committee had dined at his house, and he and Lyon were busy over schedules and plans.

'You were down in my neighbourhood, I suppose,' replied Lyon, going on writing.

'No: I was not. I was at Kensington, at a large dinner party.'

Lyon looked up. 'I do not know what friends of mine you are likely to meet at a dinner party.'

'Well, they claimed acquaintance at any rate, and spoke as if they knew you pretty intimately; at least the old gentleman did. I was telling him all about this scheme of ours, and mentioned your name as sub-editor. He seized it in a moment, and asked if you were related to his friend, Mr. Lyon—those were his words. I soon found out that his Mr. Lyon and mine were identical.'

Lyon looked puzzled.

'His daughter is a most charming girl,' continued Mr. Chester, watching him with amusement. 'I made her promise to call and see Mrs. Chester. I was not aware that you had such aristocratic friends.'

'Neither was I,' said Lyon. 'Was it Mr. Wycherley?' he added, with a sudden clearing up of the mystery.

'Mr. and Miss Wycherley. They seemed much interested.'

'In what?'

'In this plan of ours, and in the work generally—your sort of work I mean. I told them about your debating society, and the free library and so on. Miss Randolph—we were at her house—is in search of a hobby, and I want her to ride mine.

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She seems quite inclined to take it up, and may be very useful. She wants to be introduced to you. Will you go?'

'I? My dear sir, what for?'

'It is the fashion to hunt for lions nowadays. She will invite a number of people to meet you and will expect you to roar for their benefit—I mean talk.'

'And pray what am I to talk about?'

'This society of course. I told her it was your suggestion and your plan, and she will lionize you to your heart's content.'

'A tempting prospect!'

'Well, you must go.'

'Certainly not.'

'Why not?' demanded Mr. Chester.

'What good will it do?' said Lyon, coolly.

'It may do a great deal.'

'To me or to her?'

'To both perhaps, and to the society. I want you to go, Lyon; you can talk to her so much better than I can: you have had so much more experience. The fact is, she is just ready to throw herself heart and soul into this work: she has abundance of money, and will be only too glad to spend some of it in a good cause. Woman-like she wants to go into particulars, and those you can give so much better than I. I told them about that little lad Winter, and they want to know what has become of him. I am sure it will do good in more ways than one, for you to go. You ought not to lose this opportunity. The fact is, you must not.'

'Must not?' echoed Lyon, elevating his eyebrows with a look of comical surprise.

'Must not,' repeated Mr. Chester, sturdily. 'I have promised you shall go, and I cannot get out of it.'

'That simplifies matters, certainly,' said Lyon, laughing. 'It is taken out of my hands entirely, it seems.'

'Well, you can refuse to go, but I see no reason why you should.'

'I am not fit for fashionable society,' said Lyon, quietly resuming his pen. 'You forget my position. I do not wish to place myself in a false one.'

'False, nonsense! put your pride in your pocket, Lyon, if it be big enough. I think it is your duty to go. Miss Randolph wants to hear about your home. By the way, where is little Winter? have you seen him since that day?'

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'No: he has vanished altogether. The boys never catch a glimpse of him, they say.'

'Poor little fellow! I wonder what he is doing. I would like to rescue him,' said Mr. Chester, musingly. 'Mr. Wycherley told me that his daughter had been visiting some of your people. She did not strike me as being quite the style of girl for that sort of work.'

'In what way?'

'Well, in the first place, they—father and daughter—are so evidently of the conventional type of country gentlefolks. Exclusive, and expecting due reverence from any poor person they may honour with their presence; and that is just what they will not meet with among the London poor. I suppose you know that it is the old story of reverses there?'

'No; my acquaintance is very slight.'

'They were rich, I believe, and the old gentleman speculated and lost. There was some roguery no doubt: he knows nothing about business. He spoke very highly of you.'

Lyon looked up. 'He knows nothing about me: we are almost strangers. When do you want me to go to this place?'

'Miss Randolph's? Some day next week.'

Lyon was silent. He wondered on what footing he was to go; if he were to be patronized and treated as people of that class were only too apt to treat self-made men. Not a pleasant thought to a man of his temperament, and he was on the point of refusing what seemed to him an unnecessary evil, when Mr. Chester continued:—

'There were several there whom I particularly wish you to meet: men of your own stamp. If this scheme of ours is to succeed, Lyon, you must not shirk duty.'

'Very well,' he replied, resignedly. 'I will go.'

'Oh! don't make a martyr of yourself,' said Mr. Chester, with good-humoured sarcasm. Lyon laughed as he went on with his work. He had yielded against his will, but having done so, was not one to magnify the evil. On the day appointed he met Mr. Chester, and they went to Kensington together. Miss Randolph, a white-haired stately old lady, received them with *empressement*, and at once took possession of Lyon.

'It is kind of you to come,' she said, moving her dress to make room for him to take the vacant seat beside her. 'I know how very fully your time must be occupied just now.

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Mrs. Chester tells me she finds it impossible to hold any conversation with Mr. Chester except on the subject of schedules and plans: he is absorbed.'

'It would be difficult to carry out the work if he were not. I believe he has it at heart,' said Lyon, giving a rapid glance round the brilliantly lighted rooms. But his eye fell on no familiar face. Mr. Chester had joined a group of girls, and was exchanging greetings in right merry fashion: he was evidently a favourite, and a privileged one.

Almost before he knew what he was doing, Lyon was in the midst of a discussion upon the best ways and means to effect the desired end of their society. Miss Randolph had evidently been studying the subject, and was not a little proud at having mastered all its details. Lyon was surprised and amused to hear her run off the statistics as if they were a mere A B C to her.

'Ah,' she said, smiling, 'I have learnt it all, you see. I intend to keep up with the committee although they will not allow ladies on their list.'

'It is their loss. But much may be done outside the magic cordon.'

'I believe that. Mrs. Chester and I are not going to be left out in the cold.'

Lyon was enlightened: he understood now how she had obtained her knowledge. She was one of those who possessed the happy social quality of putting others at their ease. It had seemed rather a formidable thing to Lyon to be forced into a *tête-á-tête* with one of a class so far removed from all knowledge of and interest in the engrossing pursuits of his life; but in Miss Randolph he found both knowledge and sympathy, and an evident wish to learn more, which soon placed them on a friendly footing.

He liked her: there was a simple genuineness about her which suited him, and he was not insensible to the charm of her high-bred tone and manner. It was pleasant to hear his own thoughts and ideas in the cultured language so foreign in the society of his every day life.

And she in turn was both interested and attracted. In this man of the people she found an originality, an undemonstrative straightforwardness of purpose, a keen insight into character which delighted her.

'Mr. Chester,' she said, tapping that gentleman on the arm

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with her fan as he passed. He stopped instantly, with one of the old-school courtly bows. At that moment the door opened to admit two late comers, and Mr. Wycherley and his daughter came forward. In greeting them Miss Randolph forgot her intended speech, and the conversation became general.

With evident pleasure Mr. Wycherley recognised and shook hands with Lyon, and with a slight flush and smile Alison followed his example. She would shake hands with him now.

He looked down upon her as she stood before him in her rich evening dress, costly laces shading her white shoulders, and gleaming jewels on her arms and neck. Was this the girl who had given gentle pitying words in yon dreary court? He could scarcely believe it, scarcely credit it. He followed her about with his eyes, noting the unconscious grace of every action, the light in the beautiful eyes, the flush on the delicate cheek, and a strange unaccountable pang shot through his heart.

'She condescended to shake hands,' he thought, with a tinge of bitterness: 'but I am still to her only John Lyon, printer.'

It was but a momentary weakness: he shook it off, and seeing a vacant seat in a curtained recess, took possession of it and watched the scene before him with listless eyes. It was rather wearisome work, and yet it had a charm of its own. The music was pleasant, and there was much to attract and satisfy his fastidious taste. He felt very much as if he were gazing through one of the children's peep-show glasses, into a world in which he had no part and no interest, save that of a looker-on. The men, in faultless dress, with their indolent, self-assured insouciance seemed so far removed from his world as to partake of another nature. He wondered how they managed to get rid of time, but did not wonder at the bored, half-vacant expression on more than one handsome effeminate face.

'All he wants is a touch of conventional *savoir-vivre*,' said Miss Randolph confidently to Alison Wycherley. 'My dear, I admire him exceedingly! he has that rare combination of reserve and frankness, of sternness and gentleness which is so attractive to us women. He reminds me of an old friend.'

She sighed, and her eyes took a wistful tender light. There were those present who could have told of a stern-faced soldier with a smile as gentle as a woman's, who years ago had left his farewell kiss upon the lips he was never again to touch. He died, beneath India's burning sun, and the girlish lips grew

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old, but never another kiss was pressed upon them. And now there was only the memory of a brief sweet dream of happiness in a heart that refused to grow old, because its first love still held sway, and love is ever young.

Alison looked pleased. 'Papa has taken to him wonderfully. He says he will make a name in the world, and I think so too.'

'He will do more than that; child, there is a higher aim than to win a name, and unless I am greatly mistaken, it is his.'

It was an echo of Alison's own unspoken thoughts.

'My dear,' continued the old lady, still keeping her voice lowered, confidentially, 'what curious anomalies we women are! We force men to act a part for which we despise them. Look at that fop, Vernon Graythorpe: all his small life he has been taught to believe that women like and admire that would-be blasé air, and indolent effeminate drawl. His hands are as soft and white, and nearly as small, as yours.'

'He has nothing to do and he does it,' said Alison, laughing. 'He has beautiful hands, Miss Randolph.'

'To look at,' said Miss Randolph, dryly. 'If I were a girl I should prefer some distinction between my lover's hands and my sister's.'

'So should I,' said Alison candidly, much amused. She and her hostess were fast becoming great friends.

'You look quite animated, Aunt. May I ask the subject of conversation?' said Mr. Randolph's quiet voice.

'We were criticising modern men: comparing two classes.'

'Do I belong to either?'

'Certainly; but not to the obnoxious extreme. I should be very sorry if you did, Bernard.'

'And what are the two classes?'

'Nay: it is not fair to repeat what was a little private confession of prejudice, perhaps. Do not tell him, my dear.' And with a merry glance at Alison's laughing face the old lady sailed away. Her nephew quietly took her place on the couch.

'Are you a lion-hunter, Miss Wycherley?' he asked, with composure.

She did not understand him. 'We have been since we came to London,' she answered. 'Papa and I have visited most of the lions.'

'And have come here to-night to see another,' he replied in the same nonchalant indifferent tone.

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She knew what he meant now, and resented it haughtily.

'We came at your Aunt's request to meet her friends, and our own.'

For some moments he made no reply, but continued to turn over the leaves of a book. To any one who knew him the curl of his lip would have been ominous.

'Does it not seem to you the worst possible form to make a show of such poor wretches?' he asked, languidly, stopping at a picture of the Siamese-twins.

'It seems to me a cruel thing,' said Alison, relieved to find he had quitted the unpleasant subject.

'Much the same sort of thing as lifting a man out of his native obscurity and placing him in—such a place as this, for instance. Poor fellow, he must feel very uncomfortable.'

There was no mistaking the contempt of tone and look, and Alison's indignation rose. There was no one in those rooms prouder than she, no one more likely to resent and put down unwarrantable presumption. But there was also no one more just, and she knew that Lyon had never encroached, had not even taken that which had been offered him. 'I think your remark is in the worst possible taste, Mr. Randolph,' she said, coldly. 'One accustomed to the society of Mr. Chester, and whom my father receives with pleasure, is scarcely likely to feel uncomfortable, even in the present company.'

She could not resist the slightest possible emphasis upon the *present*, which was not lost upon her companion. He changed colour slightly, but turned the conversation, and did not refer to the subject again.

'He may not be the finished gentleman,' thought Alison hotly: 'but he is too good to be scorned. He makes no pretence of being more than he is, and therefore no one can despise him.'

It did not look as if Lyon stood in much danger of being despised. She could hear his voice in discussion with men whose names were widely known, and could see the absorbed face of the handsome, aristocratic old man, Sir Wilfrid Ashley, as he listened.

'The connection between a nation's morals and its literature is far more intimate than is generally believed. The earliest impressions of the world are generally gained from books. The press is the modern tree of knowledge of good and evil, and by tasting its fruit many learn the evil example of those

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who have gone before, and follow it. Look at France: her profligate morals and literature go hand in hand.'

'And what is the remedy?' asked Mr. Randolph, turning round.

'The very question we are trying to answer,' cried Mr. Chester. 'Solve the problem with that cool brain of yours, Randolph.'

'Nay: I leave the problem to the propounder.'

'It propounds itself to all thinkers,' observed Sir Wilfrid. 'It is time we took the question up.'

Alison was pleased to see her father in the circle, listening with an interest she had not seen him display for a long time. Meeting her eyes he smiled and nodded, and then came and bent over her.

'Are you enjoying it, Alison?'

'Yes, papa, so much. And you? but I need not ask.'

He laughed and patted her shoulder fondly, and went back to his place.

'Mr. Wycherley looks quite young again,' said Mr. Randolph, whose quick eyes and ears had not failed to receive an impression.

'He has been shut up so long. It is a treat for him to have someone to talk to,' replied Alison.

'I am glad you find the evening pleasant: I was afraid you were rather bored.'

'Why?' she asked, innocently.

'You do not know many of the people, and have been sitting alone part of the time,' he answered, somewhat disconcerted by the unexpected question.

'I do not mind being alone when I have so much to look at,' replied Alison: 'I like to watch people even when they are strangers. Are you on Mr. Chester's committee?'

'I have not that honour.'

'But he asked you. I heard him tell papa that he had done so.'

'I believe he did say something about it: but it is scarcely the sort of thing I care to take up.'

'I forgot: you do not believe in raising the masses.'

'Certainly not, beyond a certain level.'

'Mr. Randolph, you and I never agree.'

He looked annoyed, even hurt. 'I agree with you and Mr. Chester so far as the suppression of injurious literature goes:

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I do not altogether agree with this scheme and therefore hold aloof. I think they are attempting far too much, and there can be but one result.'

'Failure?'

'Time will show.'

'It is better to attempt too much than too little. The higher the aim the higher the flight, even though the goal is not reached. I do not think they are aiming too high, but as you say, time will show.'

Mr. Chester left early, Lyon going with him.

'But I have not said half I wish to say,' said Miss Randolph, as they wished her good-night. 'Mr. Lyon, will you come and see me some evening when all these people are away? You have been monopolized, and I want to ask you so many questions.'

The tone was so thoroughly cordial and friendly that Lyon never thought of refusing. As he turned away Alison stood by his side.

'Mr. Lyon,' she said, simply, 'I thought you would like to know that I have succeeded.'

'How?' he asked, looking down with the rare smile which so changed the expression of his face.

'I scarcely know: she thawed of her own accord, I believe. I do not quite understand it.'

'I do,' he replied, quietly, and then with a sudden flush said good-night, and turned away.

'The first time in my life that I was ever on the verge of paying a compliment,' he thought, with a feeling half of annoyance, half of amusement. 'It was true too: I can quite understand the thawing if she spoke to the poor thing with that soft, gentle voice, and looked at her with those big eyes as I have seen her look. Still, there was no occasion to tell her so.'

'Well, Lyon?' said Mr. Chester, interrogatively, as they drove home.

'I think Sir Wilfrid Ashley is disposed to take the thing up.'

'I know that, man! I mean, what do you think of the company—the whole affair—Miss Randolph?'

'She is a charming old lady. As for the company, it is impossible to give an opinion, as I only spoke to about half a dozen.'

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'Yes: you got in that circle with Sir Wilfrid and his set, and it was impossible to get you out.'

'Well, I went to talk about the society and its workings, and I did it.'

'I did not take you only for that. I tell you what it is, Lyon: your future is in your own hands now, and you may make it pretty much what you like. As the author you are already widely known, and with a little effort you may make for yourself a literary reputation. I advise you to do it: it will prove a veritable *sesame*. Don't throw away your chances, there's a good fellow.'

'On the contrary, I mean to make the most of them.'

'Keep to that and there is no telling where you will stop,' said Mr. Chester, approvingly. 'I foresee a brilliant career before you. Let me give you one piece of advice—don't saddle yourself with a wife till your position is assured. Nothing keeps a man down so much as a wife of inferior station. I have known men, who have married in haste, rise gradually in taste, feeling, education, and social position till they have far outstripped their poor little wives, who did well enough for them in their crude, uncultivated youth, but were cruel clogs to their vigorous manhood. Don't do it, Lyon.'

'I have passed my youth,' he replied, inwardly smiling, as he thought how little such a warning was needed. 'I do not think you need fear my taking any such step, Mr. Chester.'

'Neither do I: but I thought a warning would do no harm.'

As Lyon entered his own room he heard the sound of voices in the bedroom opposite. Opening the door he looked in. 'Talking at this time of night! off to dreamland with you at once.'

'Mr. Lyon! oh, Mr. Lyon! do come and wish me good-night,' cried a little white figure, starting up in bed.

'Oh, it is you, Master Dick, is it? I thought as much.'

'It's all of us. Sam's been singing a song, and I said I didn't think you'd like it: I didn't think it was a good song.'

'It isn't wicked!' fired Sam, sitting up, with some excitement. 'It isn't good, but it isn't wicked.'

'Better let me judge,' said Lyon, who was very particular what songs his little lads sang.

'Yes, let Mr. Lyon hear,' cried Dick, triumphantly. 'Sing it, Sam.'

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'I don't care!' retorted Sam, vigorously. 'I'll sing it if Mr. Lyon likes. I'm not afraid, and besides, it's only a little bit.'

'Fire away,' said Lyon, pleasantly, glad to find the boy was not afraid of him, and Sam began:

'"If you won't give me any of your dough-nuts,
When my dough-nuts are gone:
I won't give you any of my dough-nuts,
When your dough-nuts are gone.
Oh! that will be joyful, joyful, joyful!
Oh! that will be joyful when your dough-nuts are gone."'

'There!' cried Dick: 'the moral is bad, isn't it, Mr. Lyon? I knew you wouldn't like it!'

Lyon sat down on the bed and laughed.

'Dick, my little man, the moral is dreadful!'

'There!'

'And the only way, that I can see, to keep out of trouble is to give Sam some of your dough-nuts when his dough-nuts are gone.'

The application was more than Master Dick had expected, and he looked rather blank.

'What are dough-nuts?'

'Nothing you are likely to have: but apples and oranges will do as well.'

'But is he to sing it?'

'If he puts will instead of won't.'

The boys looked puzzled, and then Sam laughed. 'I know.'

'Very well. Now go to sleep and don't let me hear another sound,' said Lyon. He rose to go, but Dick held him tight.

'Mr. Lyon,' he whispered, and Lyon bent his tall head.

'Well?'

'It's dark nearly. *Please* wish me good-night as if I was your own little brother: *please*, Mr. Lyon!'

He put up his lips eagerly, and Lyon silently kissed him. None of the others knew anything about it, but it was not the first time the little fellow had begged an unseen kiss.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE GUARD'S VAN.

ALONE in the house Winter cried with vexation and mortification. He dashed the tears away angrily, but they would come as he thought of the chance he had lost: a chance that might not be his again for many a long day. And then, what did Forset mean by telling him to go back to London? Why did he want to get rid of him? He was not really ill; that queer feeling only came over him at times, he would soon be all right again. The long warm days of summer were at hand, and then he would soon pick up his strength, and be as well as ever.

He fell asleep at last, but awoke the next morning, listless and languid. Already the bright, warm rays of the sun had penetrated into the room, and made the dingy surroundings look even more dismal. He went into the next room, and with a shiver cowered down by the fire. The woman who was hastily clearing the table stopped and looked at him.

'You'd best have your breakfast and be off into the sunshine; it's bright enough out there, and you ain't fit for work,' she said, not unkindly, placing some bread and butter before him.

He took it, and went out. The children in the narrow street were rioting in the warmth and brightness of the sweet May morning, and called him to join their games. But he shook his head and slowly sought his favourite hiding place: an old wood-yard, very similar to the one in which he and Sybil used to play at hide-and-seek. It brought her back to his mind, and lying back on the warm boards he recalled the merry, bewitching little face, with its sunny eyes, and frame of golden curls. Those long silken curls had been his great admiration; many a time he had drawn them out to their full length, and twined them round his little brown fingers with

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gentle touch; but that had been before Mr. Lyon had taken her from him.

He lay all the morning in the pleasant sunshine, weak and listless. The workmen, with whom he was a favourite, gave him a friendly nod and word as they passed and left him in undisturbed possession. And so he dreamed away the morning, and at noon a sudden sharp hailstorm sent him indoors for shelter. Forset and one of the other men were there, and ceased talking as he came in. He saw at once that something unusual was on foot, and his presence was plainly undesired, so he went out again and sat in a doorway, and watched the big hailstones as they came rattling down.

'Hallo, Winter, wot's up?' cried a boy, spying him out and stopping before him. 'You look as if you'd had a summons from old Nick himself. Wot's the matter?'

'Nothing.'

The boy stood still, looking at him. 'Wot a little soft you are to turn up ill just when you're wanted,' he said, after a pause.

'Who wants me?'

'Oh, if you don't know it's no business of mine, that's all.'

'But I do know: at least I think I do. I say, Alf, do tell us all about it, there's a good fellow!' cried Winter, starting up, his face flushing with excitement. 'Do you know what they're going to do?'

'Rather!'

'Do tell us, Alf!'

'Not I! ask them.'

'They won't tell me! it's too bad!'

'It's your own fault,' replied the boy, who had had no small jealousy of the new-comer, and was by no means sorry that his short reign was over. ''Tain't my business to tell you.'

He ran off into the house. Winter watched with envious eyes to see if he were sent back. No; then they admitted him to their counsels! It was a bitter pill for the proud little fellow. He would not go into the house again, but kept away till night-fall, and then crept into his own room to bed, and fell asleep.

It was about midnight when he was suddenly awoke by a hand on his shoulder, and starting up saw Forset bending over him.

'Hush, Winter!' he whispered. 'Get up, lad, and come quick; don't make a noise.'

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He sprang out of bed and huddled on his clothes, trembling with excitement. Forset went to the street door and looked out.

'Are you ready?' he asked in a muffled whisper, as the boy stood by his side. 'Now then, sharp's the word.'

Seizing the boy's hand he darted up the street, but suddenly dashed into an entry and drew him down by his side in the darkness. Measured steps were heard in the quiet street; nearer and nearer they came, and a policeman passed with leisurely tread.

They waited till he was out of hearing, and then went on their way.

'Where are we going? What's the matter?' whispered Winter.

'Why, you're going to London, and I——never mind where I'm going. Look here, lad.' He stopped short, and turned round: 'I don't want you to get into trouble 'long o' me. You're a nice little chap, and I'd be sorry to see you hauled up. We—me and my mates—have got into trouble to-night, and it ain't safe for you to be found in our crib, d'ye see? They may be there now for aught I knows, or cares, so they don't follow our track; but they haven't had time yet. You make yer way to London as quick as you can, and keep quiet a bit. That's your road, down there: keep straight on. There's some of the needful.'

He slipped some money into the boy's hand and turned away, but came back.

'If you're axed any questions keep dark; you know nothin' and can tell nothin': d'ye twig?'

'Yes,' said the boy, with a shiver: 'but they can't touch me, I've done nothing.'

'Suspicion, that's all: you've been seen with us, and maybe they'll take you up to question you, but if you're sharp you're all right.'

He disappeared into the darkness, and Willie went on down the long street. He understood his position perfectly—knew that now, more than ever, he was an outcast and wanderer, and that between him and society another barrier was raised.

It was a cool night, the air fresh and chilly, and he hurried along, shivering in his thin, torn jacket. There was no one stirring: all was silent and still in the dreary street. His limbs ached, and his head felt dizzy, but he dared not stop.

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On he went till he had left the houses behind him, and was out on the highroad to London. Terror gave him strength; at every sound he started, expecting to hear footsteps behind him, and to feel a rough hand on his shoulder. That he had done nothing gave him no security; he knew the character of the men he had been with, and though he had not been implicated in their defeated work he was known to the police as a companion of burglars, and they would take him and question him, and perhaps send him to a reformatory.

The thought nerved him to fresh exertion, and though panting for breath he ran along the dusty road. It seemed to him that he had gone many miles, when thoroughly exhausted he crept under a rickety old gate, and found himself in a kind of shed.

In one corner was an old hand-cart tipped up, and creeping into it he curled himself up and went to sleep. But he was not left long in this retreat: a jerk which sent him to the ground roused him, and jumping up he stood face to face with the owner of the shed.

'You little rascal! what are you doing here?' he demanded, roughly.

'Only sleeping,' muttered the boy, looking round vaguely. 'I ain't doing nothing.'

'You young vagabonds never are. Be off with you this moment, or it'll be the worse for you.'

With a threatening gesture he drove him out of the shed, and then took the cart and went away, fastening the gate after him. Winter watched him out of sight, and then went back and laid himself down in the corner. He could not walk, and there was no other hiding-place near. But he could not sleep again; he lay watching the sunbeams glinting through the holes in the roof, and listening to the various sounds which told that the world had resumed its busy toil. As noon drew near he began to feel sick and faint with hunger. A little further down the road was a wayside cottage, and waiting till no vehicle was in sight he went to the door and knocked. A woman with her arms up to the elbow in soapsuds, turned round and asked what he wanted, and when he said bread, shortly replied that she had none to give away. But her tone changed when he took some coppers out of his pocket, and wiping off the soapsuds she turned to a cupboard and took out a loaf.

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'Come in,' she said, as she cut a slice. 'Sit down on that chair. Where do you come from?'

'I've been looking for work.'

'Where?' she asked, sharply.

'I've been in Worcester ever so long, but couldn't get nothing to do.'

'Have you been about by yourself?'

'No: my father was with me,' he answered, with all the effrontery of an accomplished liar. 'He and my mother have gone to Birmingham, and I'm goin' after them.'

'Where have you been since you left Worcester?'

'About the country a bit; father, he told me to see if none of the farmers wanted a boy: you don't want one, I s'pose?'

'You look a likely boy to work! what can you do?'

'Rock the cradle,' he replied, quickly, putting his foot on the rocker as the tiny occupant of a rudely-made cradle began to throw up its arms, and utter warning cries.

The woman smiled, and taking a jug out of the cupboard poured out some beer.

'I've just drawn it for my man's dinner, but I'll get some more. Here, Nat, why don't you come and take your father's dinner?'

A boy came running in, and seizing a basket lying on a chair, waited impatiently for the jug which his mother was replenishing. 'Now, don't drink it,' she said, warningly, as she gave it to him.

'Where have you been?'

''Long with Ted. Old White's house was nearly broke into last night.'

'Nearly?'

'Ay: we've been up there in the cart, and Mike told us all about it. They opened the scullery window, but old White was up, counting his money they say, and he heard 'em and shouted fire and thieves at the top of his voice.'

'Have they got them, the thieves?'

'Not yet, but the police are after them. Here, gi'e I the jug.' She loosened her hold on the jug and he rushed off.

'That's the way wi' them boys, never can get anything out of 'em,' she grumbled, going back to her tub. 'I hope they will catch 'em, that' all, the wretches. What, are you going?'

'Yes,' said Winter, rising: 'my mother'll be looking out for me. How far is it to Birmingham?'

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She told him, and with some slight hesitation took up the coppers he put on the table. 'If I didn't take it he'd spend it in summut or other, and I might as well have it as other folks,' she thought, putting it in her pocket. Looking behind him, as he hurried along the road to Birmingham, he saw her watching him, and slackened his pace till he had turned the corner and was out of sight: then, with a quick furtive look round, he crept through the hedge and went back, along the field.

Afraid to trust himself to the highway, he turned into a narrow lane, and wandered on, till the shadows of evening began to draw round. A boy about his own age passed him in a cart, and looked inquisitively at him. It was only the usual look of boyish curiosity and interest in a stranger of his own standing, but Winter's frightened conscience saw in it suspicion and distrust.

Sitting down on the bank he began to gather the primroses which grew there in wild profusion, but his hand trembled with suspense. He had turned his back to the cart, but could hear that the little driver had drawn rein and was proceeding at a leisurely pace down the lane, and he felt that he was watching him. Then the wheels stopped altogether, and a voice shouted 'Hoy!' He would not turn round or lift his head, and again the boy shouted.

'Hoy, will you have a ride?'

He turned then and shook his head, pointing in the direction of a path across the fields. The cart went on, and the moment it was out of sight he rose and ran, not in the direction he had pointed, but in the opposite one. He could not run far; that strange dizzy feeling was coming over him again, and he knew that he must stop before long. Down in a corner of the field were two or three stacks, and he made his way to them. A great wedge was cut out of one, and he crept into the corner, drawing the loose straw which lay about round him.

It was a resting place by no means to be despised, and he laid his tired head down with a feeling of security. There was no house near, and policemen did not generally perambulate fields. He had in his pocket a piece of bread which he had slipped out of sight while the woman's back was turned, and now he ate it ravenously, jealously guarding even the smallest crumbs.

At last he slept, but it was an uneasy, restless sleep. Every now and then he started up, and cast a frightened look around.

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Nat's words, 'The police are after them,' rang in his ears, and he never for one moment doubted that they were spoken of his old friends and companions. He was glad now that he had been ill, that he had not been able to go with them. 'They can't do nothing to me,' he kept repeating to himself, vainly trying to gain assurance and courage.

The next morning he proceeded on his way, asking for bread at the first cottage he came to. All day long he hurried on, keeping away from the highroad, and shunning the houses. Now and then he asked his way of a passing countryman, or stopped to rest beneath a hedge. At last he came to a village, and took shelter for the night in a barn. It joined a public-house, and he could hear the songs and laughter of the men as he lay snug and warm among a quantity of hay.

He found, too, that he was near a railway station, and peeping through a little door at the back of the barn saw the red lights of an approaching train.

It was nearly dark, and a sudden thought came to him. He would go to the station and slip unobserved into the train if possible: he had heard of such things being done by others, why not by him?

Unlatching the little door he stepped out, and darting across a slip of garden, climbed over some rails and found himself on the platform. The train came in and stopped, and one or two passengers alighted. The guard jumped out of his van to speak to one of the porters, and Winter sprang in. In one corner was an old coat thrown on the floor, and seeing a chance of safety he curled himself up and drew it over him.

The train did not stay long: the guard jumped in again and shut the door, little dreaming of his fellow-traveller who lay almost breathless, watching him from his hiding-place. The corner was in shadow, or he would inevitably have been found out: but as it was the man saw nothing unusual and suspected nothing.

After the first excitement and fright, the boy began to feel languid and faint, but dared not go to sleep. He dared not take his eyes off his unconscious companion, but watched every movement with suspense. Suppose he wanted his coat and took it up and found him beneath it! what would he do?

All the dreadful tales he had ever heard came rushing to his memory, till to his over-wrought imagination the quiet, somewhat sleepy guard assumed the ferocious aspect of a cruel,

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blood-thirsty wretch. Suppose he killed him and threw him out of the train in a tunnel! no one would ever know. Someone would find him, perhaps, and it would be put in the papers; but who would care?

Tears! what business had they to come? Angrily yet stealthily he wiped them away, and tried to think of other things. What was Mr. Gower doing? did he miss him at all? What would he say if he saw him now? And Mr. Lyon; *he*, of course, had quite given him up as a hardened little reprobate; but would he be in the least degree sorry if he heard that little Winter had been picked up on the line dead?

Back at the old subject again! and the guard's eyes were turned in his direction! Fascinated, motionless he watched the stony stare which seemed to go right through him. In another moment he would be seized and dragged to the light and—and what?

He closed his eyes with a shudder, and lay waiting the clutch of the strong hand: but it did not come. Minutes passed, and again he opened his eyes and peeped out from between the folds of the coat, but shut them with a trembling cry as he met the fixed gaze of the silent guard. In the noise of the train the faint cry was unheard, save by his own ears; but it seemed to him that the beating of his heart made far more noise! surely it would be heard!

But why did not the man seize him, and do his worst? why did he sit and watch him with that awful stare? Anything would be better than such suspense.

The train rushed on, past villages, and little wayside stations, and the night grew darker and darker. It was raining too, for he could see the drops on the glass of the window as the light from the lamps flashed on it as they whirled through the quiet stations.

At last the shrill whistle gave notice that they were nearing a stopping place, and a faint gleam of hope sprang up within him. But the next moment it was gone: with a rush there came the thought that he had been left thus long only to be handed over to his dreaded enemies the police, and sent back to Birmingham. This was the meaning of his gaoler's passive watch!

He looked at him, expecting to see a smile of exulting derision on his face, but to his surprise he was yawning and rubbing his eyes. The train slackened speed, and then stopped

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in a large, bustling station, and the guard rose, and went to the door, calling to one of the porters.

'Here's a wet night!'

'Aye: and cold too for the season. Here's June nearly in. Any news?'

'Nothing much. They've got news of that burglary affair, they say.'

With strained ears the boy listened, but could only catch a word here and there. What burglary were they talking of? He could only think of one. While he was listening the train moved and off they went again.

He could not understand it! What did it mean! Was he to be taken to London and then given up? The guard sat down, this time with his back to him, and folding his arms looked steadfastly out of the window. But he did not sit long: rising, he paced the narrow van with restless step, and every time he approached the corner little Winter's heart died within him: but he was left undisturbed: not a glance was cast at his hiding-place.

Again the whistle sounded, and the train stopped, and this time the guard opened his door and stepped upon the platform. With wildly beating heart the boy watched him, and creeping out of the corner stole to the door and looked out. There he stood at a little distance, talking to a man, and his back was turned. No one else was near, and in a moment he was across the platform, cowering in the shadow of a wall. He could hear the men's voices as they laughed and talked, and then the whistle sounded and the guard shut himself in his van with a bang, and the next minute the train was out of sight.

And he was free! Rising from the wall he ran to the end of the platform, and clambered over a fence into the adjacent grounds.

It was raining fast, and he looked round for a place of shelter. The lights from the station showed that he was in a coal-yard, but the darkness beyond was so dense that he feared to advance. A truck stood close to him, and under it he saw at least shelter from the rain. But it was a dreary resting-place, and he crept in with a big lump rising in his throat. As he lay there, in the silent darkness, he pictured a bright, warm room, the memory of which had never left him. Burying his face in his ragged sleeve he recalled the cheerful fire, and crimson rug, the comfortable couch, and pleasant sense of restful ease. And

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then rose up a dark, powerful face, with eyes gentle and kind, and a smile of peculiar sweetness, It was bending over him, and as he gazed up it seemed to stoop, and the firm lips touched his forehead.

But it was all imagination! raising his head the pleasant scene vanished, and instead there were gloomy shadows and ghostly forms on every side. He fell asleep at last, and slept till the dawn of day. While yet the grey light was struggling with the clouds of night he awoke, chilled through, and trembling in every limb. Wearily he crept from under the sheltering truck, and wearily dragged his tired, aching limbs over the wet ground. He dared not stay till the sun was up, and the men at work: he wanted to get away, far away before the world was up. Not knowing where he was he instinctively turned down the road which ran by the side of the railroad in the direction the train had gone the previous night. He had scarcely strength to crawl along, but fear urged him on. Past the houses, with their drawn blinds, and locked and bolted doors: over the bridge, down by the muddy canal. On he went, every nerve unstrung, every fibre quivering with dread, glancing behind him with fearful eyes.

The sun rose at last, but its bright rays gave him no cheering help. He did not hear the sound of wheels till a cart drew up abruptly at his side, and a rough voice said: 'Hullo, young un, where are you bound?'

He started and looked up with frightened eyes, and pointed vaguely to the distant spires.

'Lunnon? so'm I. Up with you and have a ride. Bless the little chap, haven't you got the use of your limbs yet?'

Putting his foot on the wheel the boy had slipped, and would have fallen, but for the prompt help of the man's strong arm. On they rode, the sun rising higher in the clearing sky, and signs of life gradually appearing around them. Carts and vehicles of all descriptions joined them on the road, and noisy greetings were exchanged by the various owners. At another time Winter would have been amused and interested; but now all his thoughts were concentrated upon one question. Could he escape the vigilant eyes of the police, and get to a place of safety?

His companion spoke to him, but receiving no answer looked down with curiosity at the white little face.

'Well, you're the silentest little chap as ever I see!' he

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exclaimed, drawing rein at a public-house. 'You're the fust boy as I ever met who could hold his tongue.' But though he spoke banteringly he looked pityingly at the child, and helped him down gently.

With a muttered 'Thank you,' the boy turned away and was once more alone in the streets of London.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

'I AM TRYING, SIR!'

A NEW life was opening up to John Lyon. What time he could possibly spare from his own work—work which he refused to give up—was spent in a very different atmosphere from that to which he was accustomed. Minds, like water, find their level, and for him to remain, after he was known, in the obscurity of his former life was a moral impossibility. His clear, farseeing brain and sound judgment were of incalculable value to Mr. Chester, who was not slow to acknowledge it, and the men with whom he now came in contact were forced to yield respect to his undoubted depth of intellect. There are men who worship intellect: men who have sufficient of their own to enable them to appreciate it in others, and though Lyon was not a brilliant, sparkling writer, he was a deep and earnest thinker, and his suggestions were the result of a careful, discriminating consideration. He possessed that just equipoise of mind which enabled him to grasp the whole aspect of a subject and give to each side impartial judgment. On the committee he was invaluable, his practical knowledge and long experience enabling him to grapple with many a difficulty, which would have daunted one less acquainted with the inevitable obstacles to such a work as theirs.

But though committee meetings and private meetings took up much of his time he strove hard to leave no work undone. His boys still met him week by week, and the debating society flourished: the reading-room was crowded uncomfortably, and its influence was telling upon the neighbourhood. Visit as much as formerly he could not, but he endeavoured to keep himself acquainted with all the more important workings of the huge machinery which his influence had set in motion.

It was hard work: from early morning till late at night he scarcely knew what it was to rest, and instead of wearying of

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his self-imposed toil he became more and more absorbed in it. More than once he received invitations to the houses of men who, knowing him only as Mr. Chester's proposed assistant editor, and a rising man in the literary world, thought him worthy their notice; but he declined them all. At Mr. Chester's home he met many whose friendship and regard were high honour. Scholarly men, of culture and refinement; men of genius, with the simplicity of their genius surrounding them with a rare charm. In the society of these he found the gratification of a long-felt want, an absolute need. It was unmixed pleasure to him to listen to men superior to himself, to receive new thoughts, and strengthen by discussion growing convictions.

Probably the natural instinct of ambition would prompt most men to prefer being first in their native village rather than second in Rome; but to Lyon it had long been a wearisome thing to find no higher intellectual level than his own. His own creed, that a man's first duty is to himself, his highest aim the education of himself to his widest and noblest capability, had been gradually leading him to see clearly that it was impossible for a man to do himself justice while confining himself to the society of those intellectually and morally his inferiors. He wanted a more suggestive and sympathetic companionship than books could give, and now that the coveted good was within his reach he took it eagerly, wondering to find within himself an unsuspected power. The fact was he did not know himself: circumstances had hitherto given scope for the development of but one side or phase of his character, and now, with fresh scenes, and fresh associations, he found also fresh capabilities and powers. He took the keen delight, that such a nature would be likely to do, in entering a new field, and there was a danger that almost imperceptibly he would be drawn out of his old world into the absorbing fascination of this fresh one now opening up before him.

But he saw the danger: he knew how great was the charm he had to a certain extent to resist, and it led him to watch almost jealously the encroachments of the various claims on his interest, his energy and time.

But despite his watchfulness he was forced to yield, step by step. First one work had to be relinquished, and then another, to make way for those more important. The wider field was demanding his attention, and he could not but see that th

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work affecting the welfare of thousands was of more consequence than that touching only the few. Still, it troubled him, till one evening going the round of a long-neglected district he found his place tolerably well filled. Men whom he had commissioned to do his work were doing it to the complete satisfaction of all concerned, and he turned away with a very natural, a very human feeling of humiliation: he was not so necessary as experience had led him to imagine. He had gone so long through a certain routine that he had gradually come to look upon himself as a sort of centre round which these things revolved, and lo! here were little systems calmly pursuing their way in perfect independence of him. In after life he frequently said it was a lesson he never forgot: he saw that the economy of God's law was too perfect to allow of any waste of material, that as a man's powers developed so did his sphere of work widen and increase. Each onward step left a vacant place for another to occupy, and it was not for him to look behind with fear and trembling. This came home to him as he stood in a tailor's room, talking to its occupants. There were seven of them: father, mother, and five children, all hard at work. One of the girls had taken up a piece of work and her father's quick eye fell upon her.

'No, no, Jenny,' he said, 'give that to Mary; she can manage it well, and you take this.' He handed her something else, and the girl's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

'Promotion?' said Lyon, with a smile.

'Yes, sir, I suppose that's what you'd call it. Jenny's getting a rare good hand, and I'll soon be able to trust her with the best work.'

Then these thoughts came to Lyon, and he watched the two girls, each absorbed in her new work. Jenny did not trouble about the old piece; it was enough that her father had taken it away. She knew that it must be finished, and that he was not likely to give it into hands that would spoil it, and that was enough for her.

'"Books in the running brooks, sermons in stones,"' he thought, as he left the stifling garret; 'and great truths in the commonest things of life. The Master knows better than to give work into incompetent hands, or to leave one thing unfinished for the sake of another.'

Not without regret he relinquished much that was dear to him, and passed on. There was, of course, much talk and some

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dissatisfaction among his old friends. A large singing class, numbering about forty young men and women, resented being handed over to a new conductor, but grew reconciled after a time. Lyon laughed when one of them told him that they could not get on without him.

'Nonsense,' he said: 'go and try the charm of music, and see what it will do for you. You are in good hands.'

He had more faith and confidence then, and did not let the matter trouble him. But coming home early one night he found Dick waiting at the door for him, and the child seized his hand eagerly.

'Mr. Lyon, they say you are going to give us up! that you are going to be a grand gentleman and live in a grand house and have nothing more to do with us! It isn't true, is it?'

He looked up beseechingly, and Lyon drew him into the house. 'Who told you that, Dick?'

'Lots of them. I didn't believe it: I knew you wouldn't give us up.'

'Do you know what that is, Dick?'

'No, sir: what?'

'It is faith, my lad; faith and trust. You have faith in me and trust in me. Do you think you can keep that up with someone else, who loves you better than I do?'

The little fellow looked up brightly. 'I think so, sir: He makes you kind to me, so He must be good.'

'If any one tells you that either He or I am going to leave you to yourself, Dick, tell them that it isn't true, not one word of it. If you leave us that is another thing.'

'I shall never leave you, Mr. Lyon.'

'Nor Him?'

Dick shook his head emphatically. 'I love Him, sir!'

It was answer enough, and his face showed that the words were true. Lyon did not burden his boys with over-much religion: he did not teach them that life ought to be all solemnity and psalm-singing: he knew better than that. When he had got them to believe that there was One who loved them and watched over them, who was glad when they were good and sorry when they were naughty, he knew that he had laid a good and firm foundation, upon which he hoped by-and-by to build an enduring structure. Little by little he sowed the seeds of truth and honour, and many a trivial circumstance told him that the little fellows laid his lessons to

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heart. He taught them to aim at thorough manliness, but showed them that the way to it lay through obedience, and they were not slow to understand, though they often rebelled. He found the law very useful among his wild colts, and a little wholesome awe was absolutely necessary. At first he tried the power of persuasion, speaking only of reward and love: but this did not answer with all. With such as Dick it was enough, but young as the children were they were hardened young rascals, some of them, and punishment was necessary. It did not lessen their respect and love, but rather increased it.

Dick's speech set him thinking. His lips relaxed into a slight smile, as he pictured himself, to use the child's own words, 'a grand gentleman in a grand house,'—the term *grand* seemed so comically out of place when applied to him.

'A gentleman if you like, Dick,' he said, speaking aloud in the solitude of his room; 'but never a *grand* one, little man!' He laughed, but there was more than mere amusement in his tone. Matter-of-fact, practical man that he was, he liked the old word gentleman; not in its modern sense, for now-a-days money makes the gentleman in the eyes of the world, but with its old-fashioned meaning of courtesy and chivalry, of high honour and unswerving truth. He never, as so many self-made men do, affected to despise culture: he had too much good sense and did not choose to blind himself to its power. Such as had been within his reach he had made his own: that which depended upon association he had now determined to obtain. Anything and everything that he could do to gain influence and power he had resolved to do, and his indomitable will bade fair for success.

As he sat in his room, his brain reducing a chaos of thought to order and bringing it forth in rounded sentences in the good strong nervous Saxon which made his style so attractive to many, he little dreamed that outside, in the quiet street, a tall gaunt figure stood watching his curtained window with blood-shot eyes.

His pen grew rapid with the inspiration of his subject. His dark face flushed, and his eyes kindled as he wrote of the great work lying in the future: of the magnificent possibilities, the grand mission of truth and enlightenment, which lay before them. He wrote of the black darkness of the great city's dark places: he placed in contrast a beautiful vision of a possible future. He sketched in forcible language a picture

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of *to-day*, and then with a rapid pen filled in a glorious *to-morrow*.

Enthusiast? Yes: John Lyon was an enthusiast at such times. Lost in dreams, conscious only of a mighty hand uplifting a veil and bidding him look and read and learn. He saw a world wrapt about with dark garments of sin and crime and shame. He saw its men and women grovelling in the dust of the lowest mortal life: he saw them stained with every sin that the stern Old Testament condemned, and on their foreheads the impress of their master's name. Old and young, no trace of the Divine upon their hardened faces, no gleam of heaven's light in the sunken, blood-shot eyes! It was enough to bring the hot blood surging from the man's strong heart to his face as he saw it rise before him in all the vividness of reality. It was no vision to him; he had seen and heard it all!

And was the future to be as the past? was the child to be as his sire? If not who was to prevent it? Over the seas for ages had been sounding a loud and bitter cry: a cry which had thrilled the Church's heart,—"Come and save us or we die!" and all Christendom had risen up, and the answer had gone forth in one great sob of pity,—"We are coming." Mothers had given up their sons, wives their husbands, sisters their brothers, to carry help to the helpless, life to the dying; and it was right.

But ah! upon the listening ear another cry was falling. Not from the distant isles and far-off shores, but from the crowded cities' crowded streets: from courts, and lanes, and alleys, from cellars and garrets, from the highways, and from the shivering outlaw's dreary hiding-place. "We are dying! by tens, and hundreds, and thousands, by tens of thousands! Come and help us or we die! Are we not, too, the heathen?"

The heathen of a tenfold darkness! Is it not harder to be blind in the radiant splendour of a summer's noon than in the gloom of a winter's midnight?

And while such thoughts as these were filling Lyon's mind, a desperate struggle was going on in the shadow of the opposite house. Great drops of perspiration stood on the man's white forehead, as he leaned against the wall, and looked up to the lighted window. Twice he crossed the street and took the knocker in his hand, but dropped it noiselessly each time and walked away to resume again his silent watch.

Others felt no such hesitation. A short sharp-looking man

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stopped at the door and gave a quick, decisive rap, which Lyon himself answered, for it was late, and probably the rest of the household were asleep.

'Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Lyon; thought you'd like to hear what I have just heard,' said the man, in a friendly yet wholly respectful tone.

'You are not disturbing me, Grange. Come in.'

'Haven't time, sir. It's about that little chap, Winter, you were asking me about some time back; I've heard something of him, I fancy.'

Taking a paper from his pocket he read by the light of the lamp the description of a boy which Lyon recognised at once.

'That is Winter, certainly. What has he been doing now?'

'I don't fancy he has been doing anything; but we want him for all that. He has been living with a gang of burglars down at Birmingham, and the other night my gentlemen were caught, or at least we think we have got the right ones. I daresay you saw an account in the papers.'

'And you want Winter's evidence?'

'We want several little bits of information, which Master Winter can give us. You haven't seen him yet, I suppose?'

'No: I should like to see him. Is he in London?'

'That I can't say for certain. I *think* so,' replied the man, with significant emphasis. 'I've got my eyes open, and shall keep a pretty sharp look out. I have an idea that he will work down this way.'

Lyon shook his head. 'I think not; he does not favour my neighbourhood with his company.'

'Not when he's well, perhaps: but from what I hear I fancy he's been ill, and in that case he'll be likely to come to some of his old haunts. At one time he used to be round here pretty often: down Abbey-court way. We shall see.'

'What do you want me to do? give him up if I find him?'

The man laughed. 'You'll have to let us have him for a bit; but he'll come to no harm if you're there to look after him. It might be a case for an industrial school else. He's a little rascal.'

He went off, with a pleasant good-night, and Lyon went in. From the archway opposite the man in hiding had listened eagerly, but had only caught Winter's name now and then. When the coast was clear he came out, and without a glance at Lyon's window walked off at a rapid pace, his hat pulled down

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low on his forehead. The name of Winter had brought back a flood of painful recollections, and he had no longer any inclination to see the man who held such strange power over him.

Hailing a cab he drove to his distant lodgings, and locked himself in his lonely room. It was not a bare, unfurnished, comfortless room; the floor was carpeted; rare luxury in that house! there were chairs and table, and even a couch, and on a little side table were a number of books.

Drawing a chair to the table Edward Gower sat for nearly an hour lost in thought. Then taking a phial from his pocket he held it to the light. 'Medicine!' he said, with a mocking laugh. 'It *is* medicine to me! I wonder what friend Lyon would say were he here. Brandy or opium! a toss up! A slave's a slave for a' that, man. Still it may, it may!'

He looked with wistful eyes, yet evident loathing at the dark bottle, bearing the ominous label 'Tincture of Opium.'

'It seems fool's play to call one tyrant to free us from another,' he went on, grimly. 'Which is the greater tyrant, I wonder.'

He turned his head as if listening, and then in a pleading tone said, 'I cannot help it, my darling! I must have help! I must seek strength somewhere, and why not here? It shall not master me: I promise you it shall not! Don't you believe me? Ah, I have promised so often!'

There was no one there, and yet he seemed to wait for an answer.

'It is but an experiment,' he continued: 'it can but fail, and I shall be no worse than I was before. But I have hope still; it may be the antidote: it may give the help I want.'

But though the words were hopeful, there was a look almost of despair on his face as he poured out the dark liquid and raised it to his lips. He had little faith in his own words.

After hearing the report of the detective, Grange, Lyon went back to his work. Time seemed all too short for him now; he had so much to do. As he bent over the paper absorbed in thought, the hours passed quickly, and he was again disturbed: this time by Mrs. Willett, who knocked softly at his door.

'Now, Mr. John,' she said, reproachfully, 'is this right, sir?'

'What?' he asked, not raising his head.

'Look at the clock, sir! Mr. John, do you ever look at the clock when you are at work at night?'

He looked up now and laughed. 'It is early yet, Mother.'

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'Yes, it is! it is too early for you to be up. It is nearly two, sir,' she replied, quickly. 'I'm not going to have you work yourself ill, so please just to put them papers away and go to bed. Mr. John, it's a device of the evil one!'

'I most sincerely hope not,' said Lyon, with a look of comic dismay. 'To the best of my belief *he'd* like to devise the work into the Red Sea, or some other equally distant place. I don't fancy he has a hand in it, Mother.'

'He'd have a hand in making you ill, and stopping your work altogether if he could,' replied Mrs. Willett, sturdily. 'If you won't look after him yourself, I must do it for you; he ain't going to have his own will in this house yet awhile, not if the Lord and I can help it.'

'Sworn foes!'

'To the back-bone, sir. Now, *will* you go to bed?'

There was no help for it; the kind little old woman had right on her side: right and common sense, and Lyon yielded with a good grace. It was nearly two, and he was tired and jaded with a hard day's work.

As he sat at breakfast the next morning a violent rat-tat announced a visitor, and Mrs. Willett came up with a smiling face.

'Here's a gentleman wants to see you, Mr. John. He can't come up because he's afraid to leave his carriage.'

'Afraid!' echoed Lyon. 'Is he ill?'

'He don't look like it,' she replied, with visible delight. 'It's that there animal he's afraid to leave. He sends his compliments and hopes you'll step down for a minute, as he's off for a drive.'

Wondering much who his carriage visitor could be at that time of day he went down and found Nicholas sitting in state on the shaft of a costermonger's cart, patting with affectionate solicitude the back of a sleek, well-to-do looking donkey.

'Good morning, guv'nor,' he said, his face shining with triumph and shy pleasure. 'I'm just off for my constitoo-tional, and thought maybe you'd like to see Neddy.'

'This is Neddy, is it? Well, Nicholas, you are on the road to fortune now, I suppose?'

'I hope so, sir,' replied the boy, showing his white teeth as he found it impossible to repress the broad smile that would come.

It was pleasant to see his pride in his new possession, and

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Lyon marked the touch of dignity in his manner, and the unusual air of manliness: he seemed to have grown suddenly older.

'Which way are you going?'

'Jim Dent says Islington. I'll have a try there first. Ain't he a beauty?'

The donkey, not Jim Dent. Nicholas was too absorbed to be particular.

Taking a piece of paper out of his pocket-book, Lyon rapidly wrote a few lines, and put them in an envelope, addressing it to Mr. Wycherley.

'Take this note to this address,' he said to the boy. 'I have asked the gentleman to allow you to call regularly at his house, and I have no doubt he will do so. Mind you take good vegetables there, or I shall get into trouble.'

He spoke gravely, but with a look in his eye that Nicholas knew and understood.

'All right, sir,' he replied, laughing; 'none but the very best. Mr. Lyon, will you—please don't say no—will you take something off the barrer, sir? Anything as you like. I'll take it such a favour!'

'Thank you, Nicholas,' said Lyon, looking over the stock with a business-like air. 'I think I'll take this lettuce and have it for my tea.'

'No, sir, not that one! here's a better one. Please take the very best, sir,' cried the boy, springing down and turning over the fresh, crisp lettuces with unceremonious hand.

Lyon smiled as he accepted the exchange, and put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

'Look at me, Nicholas.'

The boy looked up into the kind, strong face, and for a moment they stood in silence.

'My boy, this is the beginning of good things for you, I hope. You are starting afresh in life and the future looks bright before you. Remember this, no blessing attends ill-gotten money; be honest and true to yourself; keep the right ever before you, and God will be your friend. Do you believe it?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the boy, looking up with honest, fearless eyes. 'You don't often talk about sich things to us boys, Mr. Lyon, but somehow we can't seem to forget it when you do speak. I do mean to try to keep on steady, for I ain't one of

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them as thinks it's manly to go t'other way: you've taught me different, sir. I haven't forgot the motter you gave us for the new year yet, and I don't think I ever shall.'

'What was it, Nicholas?'

'"Not slothful in business, serving the Lord." I *am* trying, sir.'

The boy's face was earnest and grave, as if he felt it was no light thing to say, and before Lyon could answer he went on, turning his head away, 'I ain't one to talk much, sir, but please believe that I ain't such a wild cove as I used to be.'

'I do believe it: I *know* it, my boy. Do you think I have not watched you? I shall be proud of my rough colt yet.'

'I'll try to make you proud, Mr. Lyon. Good-morning, sir.' And evidently not daring to trust himself to any more words the boy drove off, and Lyon went in with a smile that told of many things.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WANDERER AT HOME.

ONCE more in the familiar streets, with houses on either side; once more in the noise and the turmoil and bustle. Looking round with bewildered eyes it seemed to the boy, little Winter, that the past must be a dream. Surely he had not so little while as yesterday been out in the green fields and lanes of the far away country! he could scarcely believe it.

But he did not think much about it; it came over him like a dreamy haze, but he did not attempt to realize what had happened. It was enough for him that he was weak and faint, and that some peril lay before him which might at any moment come upon him. All his aim was to get to the old hiding-place, and lie down in some dark corner and wait till the danger was past.

And so he crept on, and the passers-by stared at him, wondering what ailed the boy. Once an old man spoke to him: spoke sharply because he knocked against his crutch, but he did not heed what he said. He had money in his pocket still; not much, but enough to buy him bread, and pay his fare some miles on his homeward way.

Homeward! home to the dark and dirty cellar which had more than once given him shelter and safety: that was all the *home* he had.

He reached it at last; reached it by means of short stages between long rests. The sun was westering when at last he stood before the door, and he pushed against it feebly.

'Hallo there,' said a man lounging near. 'What are you up to? be off.'

'Isn't Mike here?' asked the boy, his dim eyes scarcely detecting the rough speaker.

'No: there ain't no Mikes there. Now, then, cut along.'

With trembling limbs he turned and crept away. Where?

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he neither knew nor cared. Into the first doorway where they would take him in. But all the doors were shut, and crawling into an archway he dropped his head upon his arms and waited. Out somewhere in the country a golden sunset was flooding the land with beauty: he could tell by the mellowed light that there were grandeur and loveliness, rosy clouds, and rays of radiance somewhere; but not there. He could see only one tiny patch of sky, but it could speak, and tell in turn what it could see. He knew what sunsets were now, for he had seen them; he knew how beautiful the earth could look at eventide. Almost unconsciously he contrasted the grey and dreary street with the sweet green fields and perfumed lanes out yonder, where silence dwelt, and rest and quiet peacefulness. He raised his head and watched the tiny rosy cloudlet fade and disappear, and the clear blue of the June sky deepen and darken, little dreaming who stood so near his resting place.

But suddenly a voice fell on his listless ear and sent the hot blood coursing through his veins. It only said 'Good-night,' but that was enough for him. In a moment there rose before him that old never-forgotten scene. Again he lay on a couch by the side of a blazing fire and listened to words which seemed as if they never would die out of his memory. 'Come to me, and learn what it is to be loved and trusted.'

Loved and trusted! would he love and trust him if he knew all about him?

A firm, quick tread, one glimpse of a tall, broad-shouldered man, and Lyon had passed the archway, unconscious of two thin little outstretched arms, and the quivering cry—'Mr. Lyon, oh, Mr. Lyon!'

But he was gone, and with a shivering sob the child cowered down again and pressing his hot hands to his aching head listened intently to the sound of the departing footsteps. Ah! they had stopped!

Dragging his weary limbs out he looked down the street, and knew where he was. There was the old well-known room, Mr. Lyon's room, as they called it, where he held his meetings and classes. There were lights in it now; probably some meeting was going on, and Mr. Lyon had gone in.

He did not wait to think: he *could not* think. It seemed to him that there was one thing to do—to find his way somehow to Mr. Lyon, to lie down at his feet and wait for him to take him up and carry him home. He never doubted that he

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would do it. Love and trust him he might not when he knew all—all his treachery to Mr. Gower, his ingratitude and dishonesty to *him;* but pity and kindness he was sure of, and faint, and weary, and ill, this was all he asked. The door stood open, and unnoticed he crept in and sank down out of sight behind the first crowded form.

'When Mr. Lyon came out he would stop him and ask him to take care of him, for there was no one else in the world who would do it, and he was so tired and felt so faint and ill: he thought he must be going to die.'

Suddenly there was a great noise: everybody seemed to be clapping and stamping with all their might, and when they grew quiet he heard Mr. Lyon's voice speaking from a great, great distance. 'What was he going to say? was he talking about *him?*' As the men hushed down to silence he could hear the words.

'That does me good! I like to hear it: it tells me that though I have not been amongst you so much lately, I am not forgotten. I can tell you one thing—I have not forgotten you; I never shall. Old friends are not like old clothes, to be tossed on one side when done with; at least that is not my way. But I am not going to make a speech to-night; I have come to listen. Thomas Pierson will introduce the subject of debate.'

'Won't you start us to-night, sir?' asked a voice. 'Tom can start us next time, and we should like to hear summut from you now you are here, shouldn't us, lads?'

There was a very hearty assent to this, and after a minute's thought Lyon rose.

'Well, there is a subject I should like to hear you discuss very much. As I was coming here to-night, I heard one man saying to another, "It's just my luck! I might have known it would happen!" Now, I should like you to take that word *luck* and make what you can of it.'

There was a general laugh. 'Knew the guv'nor 'd give us a tough 'un!' said one with a chuckle. 'We'll get some hard hits afore he's done wi' luck, I'll be bound.'

For some minutes no one seemed inclined to take it up; but there was one present who rarely sat quiet long, and the men clapped loudly as Jim Dent rose.

'You've give us summut to debate about now, guv'nor, that you 'ave,' he said to Lyon. ''Tain't none so easy to follow up,

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but we'll make summut of it afore we've done. Luck, well most on us thinks as how we knows all about it: there's some as has it and some as hasn't, and them as hasn't is down in the world a goodish bit. I know what Mr. Lyon 'ave give us this subject for: he thinks we throw too much on luck, and so we do: that's my 'pinion. If anything goes wrong with a chap, down it goes to the score o' luck at once, and he makes a kind o' martyr of hisself, and expec's everybody to pity him. I've done it myself and so I ought'er know. Now the question is, what is luck? If somebody'll answer that I'll be glad.

'It be just the kind o' question that a chap can't answer. Most on us knows wot bad luck is, don't us? As fur good luck, there's them that's had their share o' that too, but as fur telling wot it is! Look'ee here, it's just them things that happen whether a chap can help it or not: that's wot it is. If I goes out and gets a good sell o' things, that's good luck, and if I gets a bad sell that's bad luck. I can't help it either way. Ain't that it now?'

The speaker's voice was triumphant: he evidently thought he had given a neat answer, and many of the men thought so too. But Jim was ready for the fray.

'That's jest wot most folks think; they throw all the blame of 'most everything on luck, and never take none to theirselves. You've seen them glass balls in shop winders sometimes? them paper weights, as they call 'em. They're round, but they can't roll 'cause their sides is all cut into little flat places: whichever way you put it down it stands straight on one o' them flat places. Now it seems to me that luck is like them balls: there's allus a flat place for it to stand on, and there's no rolling of it away. I ain't going to mention no names, but there's some chaps goes out with a full barrer and comes home with a full barrer, and they say it's luck; over they tumble on that flat place, an' there's no moving of 'em. The fact is they're lazy chaps, and instead o' pushing their way 'long they crawls in at the last and takes any rubbish as is left, an' then grumble 'cause they can't sell bad wegetables. 'Tain't likely.'

'That ain't the only sort o' bad luck,' said a dissipated looking young fellow, who sat with a scowl on his face. 'I get good wegetables enough, but when luck's agen a cove, it's no use pushing.'

'There's lots o' kind of luck jest as there's lots o' flat places on the glass ball,' replied Dent. 'A man with sich a pleasant

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expression ain't got no right to expec' all the pretty young women to buy off his barrer.'

There was a laugh at the young man's expense, but Lyon checked it. 'You are right, Dent,' he said. 'I think you have got hold of the right end now.'

'Luck's a reg'lar old hypocrite,' said Dent, warming with his subject. 'You ask the Missus yonder how she come to be all in rags, and she'll tell you it's her bad luck. As long as folks 'ave got that answer ready there ain't much hope for 'em. Get 'em to see it's their own fault and you may roll 'em up in the world a bit; but never a step will they budge 'long as they've settled down on that flat place. Wot they call luck is sometimes drink, sometimes laziness, an' other things, jest as it happens.'

'Jim's right,' said old Steady's quiet, grave voice. 'Many a man, and woman too, have been ruined by resting on that flat place instead of rolling out of their faults and failings. I mind the time when I put everything down to luck,: sometimes good, an' sometimes bad; but now when one comes to think serious of it there ain't no sich thing. I don't like to hear the word, lads: seems to me sort o' heathenish; like one o' them idols the poor black critters used to be so afeard on. We ought to know better with our Bibles to tell us how every hair is counted.'

This was a most unexpected turn to the debate, and Lyon waited with interest to see how it would be taken. As a rule he did not encourage the introduction of religion into these meetings: he had tried it, but had found it a failure: the men would not listen. So he had given them an entirely secular character, and had found that their moral influence was great, and knowing that that would lead to higher things he had been content.

'I don't 'see as it matters who does it, luck or—or God,' said an intelligent-looking man near the door. 'So long as a thing's done wot does it matter?'

'Range,' said Lyon, 'suppose you came home one evening and found your boy gone, lost: that pretty curly-headed little fellow who is always on the look-out for father; what would you do?'

'Have a look for him, sir. Plenty to help look for little Charley.'

'And suppose someone told you that they saw a man pick

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little Charley up and put him in a cart and ride off with him, what then?'

Range scratched his head in some perplexity. 'I s'pose I'd tell the police.'

'Very well: and then suppose someone who knew me told you that it was I who had taken the boy; that they saw me lift him in and drive off, what then?'

Range laughed. 'Why, then I'd just wait till you brought him back, sir: that's all.'

'Then I think it does matter, Range, who does things, doesn't it? It would make every difference in your feelings to know I had Charlie, though the fact of his absence remained the same.'

'Well, looking at it like that, sir, it makes a difference of course.'

'Think it over, Range,' replied Lyon, seeing that the idea had struck him forcibly. 'Now, lads, who has a word to say for luck?'

Several of them had, and the discussion waxed hot: Jim and Steady and one or two others had ready answers.

'It's no use for *you* to talk of luck!' said Jim, as one of them rose toward the close. 'You know better, White. Jest you see wot you are since you give up the flat an' took to rolling! Why, lads, he's a gentleman to wot he were, ain't he?'

Poor White was not prepared for such a greeting, but good-humouredly joined in the laugh against himself. 'I was going to say if a man's ever so steady and industrious there's times when he's down, an' that looks like luck,' he said, as he sat down again.

'And then look at the chances some chaps get!' cried another. 'D'ye mean to say that ain't luck? Luck and fortune, they're really the same, and look how fortune favours some.'

'Fortune's a rum cove,' said Dent, meditatively. 'There's no telling one minute what'll happen next. They say as how fortune knocks once at every chap's door: all I says is I wish I'd bin at home when he knocked at mine. Blest if he'd ha' gone away so quick.'

'Look here, lads,' said Steady, rising and leaning on the back of the seat before him, as was his invariable custom when speaking on any important subject. 'No one here have got a better right than me to talk about sich things. If any man

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have had cause to believe in good and bad luck it's me: you all know that. If Mr. Lyon don't object I'd like to say a few words about it, that's if you'll let me, lads.'

'Aye, aye, fire away,' they cried, and Lyon nodded assent.

He looked round upon the crowd of faces, and for a minute was silent. Something in his manner hushed them, and they waited quietly for him to speak.

'Lads,' he said at last, 'I'm older than most of you, and I've known some o' you all yer lives, so you won't mind my speaking plain to you, will you? It's nigh upon thirty years since I fust come about here, and settled down. I'd been a roving lad, an' had seen summat of the world afore that. I'd been to America and India, but I couldn't stick to the sea, so I came to London and took to the costering. It was the same with me then as it is with some o' you young 'uns now: I jest let things run on as they would without ever a thought of the future, and most everything wur put down, as Jim says, to the score o' luck. When I come home at night and found neither bit nor sup in th' house I'd let fly and curse my ill luck as I called it, an' the worse things got the more determined I was to let 'em get worse if they liked. I wouldn't see as how 'twas any fault o' mine, an' consequently I was allus on the flat an' couldn't roll up an inch. It's all my luck, I said, an' there it stopped, an' there it might ha' been to this very day if——well, lads, you know wot brought me to a bit of a standstill, and then Mr. Lyon he give me a helping hand. I've been a long time a-finding it out, but I can tell you now wot bad luck is, an' good luck too. The one's the devil, and the other's God. There, lads, that's wot I think about it, neither more nor less. A man says it's his luck when he gets took off to prison, when if he told the truth he'd say 'twas the work o' the old serpent who pushed him on to steal or fight, or maybe beat his wife to death. Was it luck, lads, or the devil that got Stephens his ten years hard labour?'

'The devil, wuss luck!' cried a voice near the door. There was a general laugh, and Steady caught up the words.

'Yes, the devil is the worst luck, Sandy: you're about right there, my lad. There's some o' you here to-night with scarce a shilling of your own in the world, an' with miserable homes and wretched wives, an' you talk about your bad luck. Ah, an' you will have bad luck while you go to headquarters for it.'

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'The devil he've took out the patent,' said Jim; 'an' he sells the article wholesale an' retail, don't he, Steady?'

'Wot's wholesale?' asked a boy.

'He sells it wholesale to the publican, an' retail to every young wagabone as won't work honest for his livin',' replied Jim, sharply. 'His manerfactory's down in a pit, an' his workmen gets good wages an' does good work: they're paid by the piece, and have got to look sharp about them. None o' yer idle, lazy chaps, not they!'

'There's no denying that he do supply the publicans with it wholesale,' said Steady; 'an' they makes a good bargain of it. He ain't stingy with *that* article. But I'm thinking, lads, wot poor fools we must be to go an' buy ill luck jest as we buy our baccy, with a good profit for the retailer.'

'So we be,' confessed a merry-looking man, with a half-ashamed laugh. 'Steady do hit the right nail on the head there: we be poor fools.'

'Steady ain't goin' to have it all his own way,' said a stalwart young giant. 'Course wot he say is true enough so fur, but I do say as there is things no man can help. Men wot don't drink, an' are hard-working honest chaps, get trouble, an' wot's that but bad luck?'

'Is that your case?' asked Lyon, with an odd look in his eyes which made the young fellow colour.

'If it ain't mine it's many another's.'

'Are any of those others in the room?'

There was a look round, but no one seemed desirous of claiming the distinction.

'Very well,' said Lyon, 'it will be time enough to talk about that sort of luck when a man who has experienced it comes forward. We can't waste our time in talking about things that don't concern any of us. When you find yourself in that predicament, Jenks, come to me and we will talk it out. The luck I want you to discuss is that which is familiar to most of you, and Jim and Steady have had their say. Where is the opposition?'

'You won't let me have my say,' grumbled Jenks.

'Every man gets trouble some time in his life, and it ain't fair to call it luck. That ain't wot Mr. Lyon meant,' said Dent. 'And most often it's jest them things that a man can't help that he don't call luck. When Range's little lad was down with fever he didn't call it bad luck, but that's what he

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called it when every stick of furniture wur sold up: I heard him myself.'

The men laughed and looked at Range, expecting him to answer.

'I did so!' he said, with a significant nod. 'All right, mates, you needn't laugh: I ain't the fust one who's made a fool of hisself over at the Jolly Coster—an' then whined about my ill luck. Howsomever that's past an' gone, I hope. I've got off the flat and am on the fair roll up hill now, 'long with a few others. I only wish more of you'd come too.'

'Range an' me have joined the Coldstream guards, haven't us, Range?' said Dent. 'That's the regiment wot's on the road to glory! Hurrah for the Coldstream guards!'

'I'm one too!' cried little lame Dick from his corner by the platform. 'I'm the drummer boy! Mayn't I go along with you and Range and Nick, Jim?'

'To be sure, and be captain one o' these days perhaps,' replied Jim, good-humouredly. 'It ain't allus the big an' strong as gets on best. Lads, let's give three cheers for the Coldstream guards, and death to the devil's patent! Hip, hip, hurrah!'

The clock was on the stroke of ten, and the men were in no hurry to leave. Lyon passed through their midst with a friendly word for each. Jim Dent, who was pressing his way out, caught sight of a little crouching figure in the dark corner by the door. There was something familiar in its aspect, though he could not see the face, and stepping over the form he put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

'Why, Whistler! where on earth have you been a-hiding yourself all this time?'

The child rose to his feet and stretched out his arms as if he were blind,

'I want *him!* take me to *him.*'

'Hallo, little matey!' cried Jim, catching the slight figure as it swayed and would have fallen. 'Wot's up now?'

His exclamation attracted attention, and a group speedily gathered round.

'Why, it's the Whistler! it's Winter!' they said in astonishment, and Lyon caught the words. They made way for him, and once more he bent over the insensible form of the little outcast.

It was impossible that the past should not revert to his

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mind, and a look of pain crossed his face as he looked upon what he took to be the sleep of intoxication. But Dent knew better.

'This ain't drink, sir,' he said in a low tone: 'it's summat more'n that. He's nothing but skin and bone.'

Lyon silently lifted the boy and carried him from the stifling room into the cool air outside.

'He has fainted,' he said quietly. 'Don't press so close, there's good lads, and one of you fetch some water.'

'He wants to be taken to some one,' said Dent, rubbing the limp little hand. 'He ast me to take him. Ah, that's right,' he added as the large dark eyes slowly opened. 'Cheer up, little matey; you're all right now. Where do you want to be took?'

The child slowly turned his head, and looked up into Lyon's face.

'What is it, Willie,' he asked, seeing the wistful pleading look, but not understanding it. 'Do you want to be taken anywhere?'

'Will you take me home—to your home?' he gasped. 'I will be good now, sir! I ain't all bad, 'deed I ain't! and I will be good, sir!'

A great choking sob stopped the words, and big tears welled up in the sunken eyes, as he waited breathless for the answer. Ah! would Mr. Lyon cast him off and tell him to go to those who had befriended him before?

'My poor little fellow! Hush, don't cry; I will take care of you now. You shall go home with me.'

He sank back in the strong arms content and at rest; only conscious of the sudden lifting of a heavy load. He closed his eyes, but knew they were going home: he knew every turn of the way.

'I will take care of you now!' The words came again and again, like the pleasant echo of a pleasant song. 'You shall go home with me.'

'Home! perhaps after all God was good and kind. Mr. Gower said He was to some folks. If God were like Mr. Lyon —No! if Mr. Lyon were like God! Which was it?'

Confused and bewildered he tried to think out what he meant; but all sense seemed to have gone out of words, and then he stopped thinking altogether.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on a little bed in a

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tiny room. He could hear voices by him, and turning his head languidly saw Mr. Lyon and a stranger standing beside the bed.

'Am I going to die?' he asked, and they turned quickly to him.

'Indeed no, my lad,' said the one, kindly. 'No such thing for many a long year, I hope.'

'What is the matter with me?'

'A great deal, but nothing that Mr. Lyon and I cannot put right. Do you like medicine?'

'No, sir.'

'Then you like chicken and broth and jelly and all that sort of thing. Now, don't speak: I know you do: I can see it in your eyes. Don't you know that doctors can read people's likes and dislikes in their eyes? Now shut your eyes again and lie quite still for a little while.'

With a nod and a smile he went out of the room, and Mr. Lyon went after him. For some time all was quiet, and then a voice said,—

'Here is some of the doctor's medicine, Willie: try it and see how you like it.'

He felt the strong arm lifting him up, and then something hot and delicious was put to his lips and he swallowed it. He felt better after he had taken a few spoonfuls, and lay back again on his pillow, tired and weary, but very happy. His hand was lying outstretched upon the pillow, and presently he felt fingers pressed upon his pulse. Opening his eyes he saw a tiny, almost indistinguishable mark on the hand so close to his face.

With a sudden uncontrollable impulse he moved his head forward, pressed his lips to the scar and kissed it. He recognised it.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

WILLIE TELLS THE TRUTH.

'MISS RANDOLPH, do you wish to hear a story?' The speaker was Mr. Chester. A few friends had dined with him, and the gentlemen had just entered the drawing-room.

'Certainly. What is it about?' replied the lady, turning toward him with a smile. 'I need not ask if it be worth listening to, coming from such a source.'

'I do not intend to tell it you myself. It is an interesting, and to some minds a curious, page from real life. Ah, Miss Wycherley, you will like it too; it is the sort of thing that ladies do like to hear. I will make my friend Lyon tell you it himself.'

'Mr. Lyon does not like telling stories,' said Miss Randolph; 'I have tried him several times.'

'But he will tell this. Lyon, these ladies would like to hear about little Winter.'

'The boy who bit Mr. Lyon?' cried Miss Randolph. 'Oh, is he the hero?'

'There is no story. The boy was taken to Birmingham by some men who intended to make use of him, but he was ill, and therefore useless. He came back to London the other day, and is now with me. That is all.'

'Lyon, Mrs. Chester wants to speak to you,' said Mr. Chester, with a look of comic significance at Alison.

'Isn't he a provoking man!' said Miss Randolph, as Lyon went and took a seat by Mrs. Chester. 'I suppose the story in some way concerns himself?'

'Exactly. He does not choose to talk about himself. Wonderful man, eh? Well, you shall not lose the story, I will tell it myself.'

Mr. Chester knew how to tell a story. Little Winter's history gathered pathos in his hands, as he described with

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vivid picturing what he himself had seen. The crowded room, the intoxicated men, and, worse, the intoxicated child! the savage bite, and then the deep sleep of insensibility. He told of the boy's sweet voice and beautiful face; of his life of ignorance and wilful wickedness.

A silence fell upon the room, and conversation stopped as Mr. Chester grew eloquent with his subject. Even Lyon listened with interest, and saw what had hitherto been to him one of the ordinary saddening occurrences of his daily life, grow beneath the skilful touch of the word-painter into a perfect picture, full of lights and shadows, the picture of a life.

'And the boy actually came to Mr. Lyon, and asked him to take him home!' said Miss Randolph. 'Mr. Lyon, it seems that you had succeeded where you thought you had failed.'

'Madam?'

'You thought you had no influence, no power over the boy; but you were mistaken. What magic did you use?'

'Don't ask *him!*' cried Mr. Chester. 'He knows nothing about magic: it was chance, of course, mere chance that the boy happened to come to him! No result of anything he had ever said or done!'

'Is he very ill, Mr. Lyon?'

'No: long neglected colds, exposure to all sorts of weather, and want of proper food have brought on a sort of low fever. All he wants is good nursing. Miss Wycherley, you know him.'

'The little fellow who ran away at the sight of you? I remember! he had such beautiful eyes.'

'And now all your sympathy is enlisted, of course! Miss Wycherley, I know a boy, an ugly boy, and he is ill too, and poor.'

'I am sorry,' said Alison, laughing. 'If there be anything I can do for him, I will do it with pleasure, Mr. Chester.'

'Umph!' said Mr. Chester: 'ugly fellows, such as you and I, Lyon, would fare badly if we were street Arabs.'

'That is not fair,' replied his wife.

'Half the philanthropy of modern ladies, or rather the philanthropy of half the modern ladies, is mere sentimentality,' he continued; 'it is, "Oh, Mr. Chester, we are getting up a bazaar for the *dear little* street children, and *will* you give us a handsome subscription?" or, "We are collecting for a dinner for those nice interesting beggars that Mr. G——d speaks of in his delightful books." That's the sort of thing; and they

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don't care a jot for whom they beg, so long as they do beg. It's all one to them. Ask one of them to take any really active useful part in a hard-working charity and see how she looks. "Mamma objects to our mixing with the miscellaneous collection of city workers." Fancy work is very well in its way, but there's little fancy work in the real thing. I am not speaking against bazaars, ladies: admirable institutions in their way, and keep a lot of girls in work, when otherwise they'd be in mischief perhaps: but I often wonder how much real wish to do good is mixed up with a thousand-and-one other motives. Miss Wycherley, are you working for a bazaar?'

'Not at present: though I am afraid I shall actually come to that before long: I had a circular to-day.'

'Ah! I suspected something from your face. But not one of my remarks can touch you, so I am safe. Frida,* have you asked Miss Wycherley to let you see her pet, little Sybil?'

'Papa! I'm to go and spend a whole day with her, and Katie and Sybil are coming too!' cried the child, pushing up her golden head under his arm. 'But I do want to see the poor little boy too, and lame Dick, papa! you said I should see him.'

Mr. Chester laughed as he drew the young lady on his knee. 'So you shall one of these days. My daughter, at her present discerning age, believes in seeing and doing personally, ladies: what she will believe in ten years' time is beyond me to say.'

'I shall believe just what you do, papa.'

'That is a nice responsibility to put on my shoulders, Miss Chester!'

'Mustn't I?'

'Ask your mother.'

'Oh, I know what she will say! Papa, what are you going to do with Willie?'

'I? What is Mr. Lyon going to do with him, you mean.'

The child turned and looked at Lyon. 'Perhaps he will run away again when he gets better,' she said, thoughtfully. 'Mr. Lyon, please tell him that I do want to see him so much, and ask him not to run away before I come.'

There was a general laugh, which rather abashed the little lady. Lyon came across and took the vacant seat by Alison.

'Do you think he will run away again?' she asked.

'No: he is much changed. But I have not said much to him; poor little fellow, he is too weak to talk, or to be talked

* Pronounced Freeda.

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to. In a few days I shall take Sybil to him, and let her cheer him up: he is rather down.'

'Because of his illness?'

'Not entirely. I fancy he has something he wants to tell me. I have great hope of him.'

'I am so glad!' said Alison, impulsively. 'I have often thought of him, especially since Mr. Chester told us how he bit you. Mr. Lyon, if you had left him to himself then, he would not have come to you now.'

'I daresay not. He cannot forget that bite.'

'Has he spoken of it?'

'No,' replied Lyon, abruptly; and then slightly coloured as Alison looked at him in some surprise. 'There are other means of telling besides by words,' he added. 'I could see it in his eyes, as he looked at the scar.' He would not tell her the truth.

'Mr. Chester said he felt inclined to give him a good shaking: he was very angry with him at the time. What made him dislike you so much?'

Lyon shook his head. 'I do not know. I have come in his way once or twice; for instance, that day in Piccadilly: but there is something more than that I am sure. We shall see.'

'You think he will tell you?'

'I am sure he will.'

'Are you so acute a reader of human nature as to be able to know what people will and will not do?'

'Some faces tell the story. Willie, despite his hardening education, has a finely strung nervous organization, and it is not difficult now to read him. Do you never meet with faces which will speak the truth whether their owners will it or not?'

'What as school-girls we used to call tell-tale faces? Yes, I know them,' said Alison. She looked up and Lyon smiled.

'No, mine is not one of them.'

It was her turn to colour, but she laughed too. 'I think mine must be, as you read my thought so easily. I did not expect to see you here to-night, Mr. Lyon.'

'I did not mean to come, but Mrs. Chester wished it. She held out inducements I could not withstand, though I had work to do.'

'I think you did right in coming.'

'May I ask, why?'

'Because I think you owe a duty to society,' she replied,

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looking up with her candid eyes. 'If people wish to see you it is not right always to refuse: it is ungracious. Why should you?'

'Society and I have had so little to do with each other that we have yet to learn our relative duties. But I do not always refuse.'

'I heard Mrs. Ransom tell Mrs. Chester that her husband had asked you twice to dine with them, and you had refused.'

'Because I do not like Mr. and Mrs. Ransom. Does society demand the sacrifice of one's own judgment, taste, inclination? Must I go wherever I am asked, Miss Wycherley?' he said, with pleasant sarcasm. 'Mr. Ransom makes a mistake in asking me. Were you there on Thursday?'

'Yes: papa said we had better go.'

'And if you had consulted your own inclination, you would have stayed away?'

'I do not know; no, I think I should have gone out of curiosity, though I do not much like Mrs. Ransom.'

'My curiosity was not sufficiently strong: beside, I was otherwise engaged.'

'Yours is a busy life. Mr. Lyon, I wonder if you would have taken up your present work if you had not been brought up in the midst of the London poor.'

'I have wondered the same thing myself, sometimes. How far is character the result of education? It is an interesting question, but I am inclined to think an unanswerable one. Can you imagine what you would be under totally different circumstances from those which have surrounded your life, Miss Wycherley? struggling with poverty, for instance, in Abbey-court.'

'Not so brave and cheerful as Mrs. Ripon, I am afraid. I do not know what I should be, or do. I should go mad, I think.'

'That, or rise into the unnoticed, unseen heroism of many a grand, self-sacrificing life.'

There was not the slightest inflection of personal feeling in his tone; nothing that allowed any suspicion of an intended compliment. It was his opinion of her possible character under imaginary circumstances: his cool, impartial opinion, given without a thought of personal interest. He would have said the same of any other who gave him the impression of strength of character, of mental and moral force. And Alison felt that

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he only did her justice: she knew that there was that in her which might, under fostering influences, develope even into heroism, as he called it, for she knew what he meant. Not the heroism of daring deeds, achieved in all the hot tumult of excitement; but the heroism of self-sacrifice, of unselfish toil, and patient endurance. God's heroism, as well as the other.

But what influences could bring it about? Ah, that she could not tell. As far as she knew it was just as likely that she would sink into the listless lethargy of despair: in fact more likely.

'I am glad I am not tried,' she thought. 'I do not want that sort of heroism. I am sure it would not suit me at all. I would rather my present monotonous life.' But the next moment she corrected herself. 'It is not monotonous now: it has altered of late. No: it is becoming a very pleasant life, and I like it. I am glad we came to London after all.'

It was becoming a very pleasant life. Miss Randolph had taken a fancy to her, as also had Mr. and Mrs. Chester, and she was a frequent guest at both houses. She could no longer complain that she had nothing to take up her time, for objects of interest were daily increasing. One thing led to another, and her hands were full of work. It was impossible to visit one room without hearing something of the occupants of the room below or above, and Mrs. Ripon was of a chatty disposition. By-and-by Alison found she was watched for by the little bonnet-cleaner at the entrance of Abbey-court, who after frequent curtseys and 'good mornings' at last ventured to ask her to walk in. In this and similar ways her circle of humble friends enlarged, and more demands were made upon her sympathy and time. Wilson too, was as well known as she, and while her mistress was in one room frequently made acquaintances in another, and had a small circle of pensioners of her own. The inhabitants of Abbey-court were mostly of the respectable hard-working class: people who tried hard to keep the wolf from the door, and bore privation and hardship with uncomplaining endurance.

It was perhaps fortunate for Alison, just at the onset of her new experience, that it was so. If she had come across some of the deceitful impostors, whose delight it was to impose upon the ignorant and inexperienced, she would probably have been disgusted; judging the whole by what she would have taken to

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be a fair sample. As it was, there was no deception, and her sympathy and help were well bestowed, winning for her gratitude and respect.

It is a law of our nature that pleasure bestowed brings pleasure again, and she found it to be so. It was a pleasure, a great one, to take little dainties to the sick and suffering, and food to the hungry. The children grew to associate her coming with smiles, and merry words, and the distribution of biscuits, or sweetmeats: they were always ready with a welcome. She smiled at herself, sometimes, as she sat in some lowly room listening to tales of poverty and troubles, and wondered what her cousin Dora or Mr. Randolph would say if they saw her. Not that she cared: she was much too independent for that, and too accustomed to rely upon her own judgment.

'It is nothing to them, nor indeed to anyone but papa,' she said. 'It fills up my time and gives me something to think about, and I do not mean to go to any unpleasant extreme. Any lady may visit the poor, if she does it at proper times. I am not going to renounce society and set up a mission.'

She was all the more unlikely to renounce society now that it was becoming pleasant and engrossing. There were pleasant people in London she found, who welcomed her to their homes, and were neither empty nor ultra-fashionable. Like most women she liked to have some especial scheme to take an interest in: hobby riding, some people call it: and Mr. Chester's plan gave her just what she wanted. She was not the girl to take up with much energy the ordinary pursuits of the nineteenth-century young ladies: she had never won a game of croquet in her life, and as she herself acknowledged, had not patience for chess. Amateur concerts, bazaars, and such favourite hobbies of many country girls had never attracted her; but this scheme suited her exactly, and Mrs. Chester found in her an eager, interested helper. Together they mastered all the details, and were as well informed in the subject of difficulties and obstacles as Mr. Chester himself.

Lyon found this out somewhat to his surprise. They had joined Mrs. Chester, and she had brought up the subject, asking many questions.

'I hope you do not intend to overlook the girls, Mr. Lyon,' she said. 'I hear so much about the boys and their interests, but what about the girls?'

'Our work would be a poor one if it did not touch the girls,

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We shall not neglect them. But the danger for them is not so great as for boys.'

'Why not?' asked Miss Randolph. 'I should think it was greater.'

'Nay: girls are more easily suited than boys; they will read books that boys will not look at. Any pretty, simple story will please an ordinary little girl, and the name of such books is legion. Boys are different; they want stronger food; something more exciting and stimulating to the imagination. I have no difficulty whatever with my girls. Give them "Anna Ross," or "Ministering Children," and they are perfectly satisfied: but with my boys it is a different matter. There are a great many good boys' books, but I hope before long to see many more, and all of them down at a low price—street price. Have you the specimen illustrations by you, Mrs. Chester?'

Mrs. Chester had, and brought them out from a portfolio. They were capital, striking illustrations, calculated to arrest the juvenile attention and awaken considerable curiosity.

'I declare I want to read the tales!' said Alison, laughing, as she held up a particularly exciting picture. 'It seems to me the hero's escape is a physical impossibility.'

'And yet it is a perfectly truthful representation of a fact,' replied Lyon, glancing over her shoulder. 'The incident really took place, and the hero escaped.'

'How do you know?' she asked, looking up.

'Because I had it from the lips of the hero himself. He gave me permission to use it.'

'You! then you are writing the story?'

'I am writing that one. The magazine will contain several. We are relying a great deal upon our pictures.'

They were pleasant evenings spent at Mr. Chester's, and unconsciously Lyon learnt many lessons. It was impossible to mix with people of culture and refinement without gaining somewhat of their *savoir vivre*, and his innate good taste made him apt to learn.

On his return home he found Winter awake and evidently waiting for him. He was hot and restless, and said he could not sleep. Mother Willett had been staying with him, and had just left. Lyon sat down by the bed, and took the little hot hand in his. They had as yet had no real conversation: the boy had told him of his journey to town, and something

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of what had gone before, but not much. As he sat there his thoughts went to his last interview with Gower, and he wondered if Willie could explain any of the seeming mystery.

Turning to him he found his eyes fixed on him with a wistful questioning, which he had observed more than once of late.

'What is it, Willie lad?' he asked, gently.

'Have you seen Mr. Gower, sir?'

Instead of answering the question he asked another. 'Do you remember one night, a long time ago, giving me a message from Mr. Gower? you were passing as I stood at the door, and said Mr. Gower sent his compliments, or something to that effect.'

Winter's face coloured. 'Yes, I remember,' he whispered.

'Did he really send that message?'

'No, sir. I made it up.'

Lyon was silent: here was fresh mystery. Certainly Gower had referred to that message as sent by himself. What did it mean?

'I saw Mr. Gower a little time ago,' he went on quietly: 'he told me that he sent me a message by you and that I had returned an insulting answer. I thought that message was one of your own, Willie.'

'So it was! so it was!' cried the boy with an uncontrollable sob. 'Oh, Mr. Lyon! may I tell you, please? I can't bear it any longer.'

He could scarcely speak for agitation and hysterical sobs, and Lyon tried to quiet him. He succeeded at last, but seeing that he would not rest till he had told what was on his mind he let him speak. Holding his hand tightly, as if afraid he would go and leave him upon hearing what he had done, Willie told him all. How Gower had sent him with that note and he had torn it up and taken back a fictitious message.

'I have wanted to tell you, sir: oh! please say you forgive me, and won't send me away! I know it was wicked, but I was never taught to be good, and I was so afraid you'd take Mr. Gower from me like you did Sybil.'

'Sybil!' echoed Lyon, his surprise increasing. 'What did I do to Sybil?'

'You wouldn't let her love me 'cause I was so bad! I know I was bad, sir, but indeed I would never have hurt her. She was such a dear little thing, and I did love her so.'

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'My dear boy, there is some great mistake somewhere. I never told Sybil not to love you. What do you mean?'

'She wouldn't come with me for a walk, and hit me when I touched her. She said I was a bad, dirty boy.'

'And you thought it was my doing. Willie, I wished you and Sybil to be friends. I told Mrs. Ripon to let you come and play with the child because I wanted her to influence you for good. I was sorry to hear you had given her up. Do you believe it?'

Believe it! every word gave its own assurance of truth.

'I see you do. Ah well, we can remedy that when you get a little stronger.'

'And Mr. Gower, sir! where is he?' whispered Willie. 'Can't I see him and tell him?'

'Not just yet, I am afraid. When you are well enough you shall go and tell him all about it.'

'Won't you fetch him here, sir?' he pleaded; but Lyon shook his head. 'I cannot do that, Willie. Mr. Gower is naturally angry and indignant with me, and does not wish to see me. We must wait.'

'When shall I be well enough, sir?'

'Not just yet: you will be better now you have told me all about it. Try and go to sleep now, my boy.'

But there was still something to be told, and Willie could not rest. 'Shall I have to go to prison, sir?' he faltered, with quivering lips. 'I can't sleep for thinking of it.'

'No: you shall not go to prison: I promise you that. Does that satisfy you?'

The look and tone, more than the words, took the load off the boy's heart, and in a short time he was sleeping calmly. After that he began to improve, though very slowly. Sybil and Katie came to see him, and the old playfellows were once more friends. The intensely hot weather was against the boy's recovery, and Lyon thought of sending him into the country. When he broached the subject he met with the most determined opposition from Willie himself, who shrank from leaving him, with a dread of the separation.

'I shall never get well if you send me away!' he sobbed. 'Never! never! I shall get worse and die, and never see Mr. Gower and tell him all about *that!* Please don't send me away, Mr. Lyon.' And Lyon had not the heart to do it. Every evening the little fellow used to sit at the open window and

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watch for him, and no one could induce him to have his tea till Mr. Lyon came. He never grew tired of hearing him talk, and touched everything belonging to him with almost reverent hands. At night he lay and listened for his footstep, and went to sleep contentedly after hearing his usual 'Good-night, my boy.' A thorough reaction had set in, and instead of hating Lyon he seemed to idolize him. 'To please Mr. Lyon,' was the most potent argument Mrs. Willett could use, and one that never failed. But he did not forget Gower: down in his heart was a strong and faithful love for his old *friend*. He told Lyon one night that Mr. Gower had called him his *friend*, told it with a look of pride and satisfaction which said how dear it still was to him. He spoke, too, much of the old life, when he and Gower had lived together, but it always brought a cloud to his face. Every day he tried his strength, longing restlessly for the time when he could go and make right what he had made wrong. Often he laid his head on the cushion and sobbed with impatience and a foreboding of ill. 'Suppose Mr. Gower were dead! he would never know how good and true Mr. Lyon was! he would always think that he had sent that wicked message.' At such times the boy hated himself, and fits of melancholy would come over him. He did not talk much about it, but brooded over it when alone. It seemed as if he never would be well again, and he chafed against the weakness which kept him a prisoner. Meanwhile Lyon had made inquiries, and had found that Gower had again left his lodgings, and no one knew where he had gone. He told Willie, and was surprised at the blank look which came over his face.

'Never mind,' he said, 'we shall find him again, no doubt. You must not make a trouble of that.' But he did not know what a disappointment it was to the boy, nor what tears he shed that night over the downfall of his hopes.

July was nearly out before Willie left the house. Mr. Lyon took him and the children for a ride into one of the parks, and after that he gained strength more rapidly. He tried himself with short walks up and down the street, not fearing the policemen now, for the little he had to tell concerning Forset was of no importance, that gentleman having been taken and returned to his old quarters.

Day by day he found himself getting stronger, and the busy brain began once more to form plans. He said nothing to Lyon, fearing that he might not be successful. One close warm

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evening he went out, telling Mrs. Willett he was going for a walk. At the end of the street he stopped and looked round. Dick was hobbling along on his crutch, and with a sudden resolve he went up to him. 'Dick, if I am not home tell Mr. Lyon I've gone to look for Mr. Gower.'

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CHAPTER XXXV.

RECONCILED.

WITH only one thought—to find Mr. Gower and tell him all the past—Willie hurried on as fast as he could. He had not come out without a plan; after thinking about it for days he had at last hit upon what seemed to him a very feasible one. It was to go to the shop to which Gower himself had once sent him, and ask his address from Mr. Burt.

'What do you want with him?' asked that gentleman, as he made known his business. 'Is he a relative of yours?'

At one time the boy would not have hesitated to answer yes, but an unwonted feeling forbade it now, and he replied quietly: 'He is a friend of mine. I have been in the country, and have been ill, and I find he has left his lodgings. I am anxious to find him.'

He purposely worded the sentence as well as he knew how, and his appearance helped the impression made on Mr. Burt, who little thought the well-dressed handsome little fellow was the same young rascal who had snatched Gower's parcel from his hand.

Without further delay he gave him the address, which to his surprise he found was a very little distance from Mr. Lyon's house. Trembling with impatience he turned to retrace his steps. He met more than one of his old friends and stopped to speak to them, pleased to see the familiar faces. Nancy overtook him as he was turning down a side street, and gave him a friendly greeting: they had always been on good terms.

'This is a lark!' she said. 'Fancy you living with Mr. Lyon after all! I always told you you were a little fool, didn't I?'

'I didn't know him so well then. You didn't always think so much of him.'

'Well, I was like you. But there ain't a better man going;

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I will say that for him, though he did pitch into me the other day,' said Nancy, candidly.

'He doesn't often pitch into folks.'

'That makes it worse when he does. He made me wish I was 'long with Rose. I know that.'

'Where is Rose?'

Nancy stared. 'Didn't you know she was dead!'

'Dead! no; I did not know,' replied the boy, shocked. 'Poor Rose!'

'Lor! folks must die,' said Nancy, with a flippancy that was only assumed. 'There's that Gower man you used to know. I expect he's dead by this time.'

'Why?' cried the boy sharply, a sudden pain sending the blood quickly through his veins.

'You needn't look so fierce. Ask Mr. Lyon if he don't think so.'

The boy turned away with a sick fear at his heart. Suppose he never saw Mr. Gower again, never told him that he had not run away from him, and that Mr. Lyon had never sent that message. The thought seemed to take all the strength out of him, and he leaned against a lamp-post for support.

He little knew that the one he sought was so near him.

For some time Gower had been in quiet respectable lodgings not far from Abbey-court, and once had called to see Mrs. Ripon, much to her surprise. The children were out, but came in while he was there, and he took Sybil on his knee. She recognised him directly, and dived into his pocket.

'You did give me sweets once,' she said, in her pretty babyish coaxing way. 'Have you got sweets now?'

'Look and see,' was the reply, and the tiny fingers instantly went on a voyage of discovery. There were rapturous cries of delight as packet after packet of bon-bons came to view, and Katie clapped her hands with glee.

'We will take some to Willie!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, Sybil! won't he be glad?'

'Who is Willie?' asked Gower.

'He's my boy,' said Sybil, sturdily. 'He is a nice boy now: I like him.'

'It's that boy Winter, sir,' interposed Mrs. Ripon. 'He's been ill, and Mr. Lyon has nursed him. He is altered, they say, and don't go on as he used: he was a young rascal!'

'He has turned over a new leaf, has he?' said Gower, with

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undisguised sarcasm. 'A fit play-fellow for good little girls now, I suppose.'

'Yes, sir,' said unconscious Mrs. Ripon; 'or Mr. Lyon wouldn't let them go. He's very particular. I take it a good sign that the boy is so fond of him: he used to hate him, but bless me! there's no one like Mr. Lyon now.'

'And you go and play with him?' continued Gower to the child. 'When are you going again? to-morrow?'

'No: it's our school-treat to-morrow! Are you coming too?' said Sybil.

Gower laughed. 'I think not. Would you like me to come?'

'Yes: but I'd rather Mr. Lyon came,' was the candid and unflattering reply. A look of pain crossed Gower's face, and he put the child down and rose to go.

'You still keep this little one,' he observed carelessly. 'I suppose her friends pay you.'

'They've paid very regularly of late, sir. More than they'd need. I've put by some for a rainy day: there's no knowing what may happen: she may take a fever or something and then I should want the extra money.'

'If she be taken ill they will be sure to see that she has everything necessary,' said Gower, hastily. 'No doubt they keep a pretty sharp look out. Here, my pretty one, will you give me a kiss?'

'No,' was the uncompromising reply.

'Sybil! Sybil! I am ashamed of you!' cried Mrs. Ripon. 'This is the kind gentleman who found you when you were lost. Go and give him a kiss directly.'

The child reluctantly lifted up her pouting lips, but Gower took no notice. With a friendly farewell to Mrs. Ripon he left the room. Sybil stood gazing after him in speechless astonishment: it was the first time the imperious little lady's kiss had ever been rejected, and she did not know what to make of it.

'It serves you right,' said Mrs. Ripon, reprovingly. 'I shouldn't think Mr. Gower would bring you sweets any more. I am ashamed of you!'

For a moment Sybil stood looking at the door, with heaving chest and flashing eyes; and then dropping the sweets on the floor rushed out of the room.

'Mr. Gower! Mr. Gower!' she cried: but he was far up

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the court, and did not hear her. She went back, and sitting on the floor sobbed quietly to herself, as was her fashion.

Mrs. Ripon could neither comfort her nor find out the cause of her grief: if her feelings were hurt, or her dignity touched, or that she feared she would get no more sweets. However a few judicious remarks about the next day's trip soon brought back the sunshine, and the little lady dried her tears to listen.

Gower went back to his rooms. A change had come over him of late: he no longer avoided the neighbourhood of Lyon's home, nor kept within doors till dark. The fact was, continued self-control was giving him confidence, and there were times when he felt an exultant consciousness of his own power to conquer. Not one drop of wine or brandy had passed his lips since that day in early spring, when so many influences had combined to rouse all his strength of will, and he was beginning once more to feel faith in himself.

But he could not conquer, indeed he did not try, the old sore feeling against Lyon, and the news of Winter brought it all up again. He wondered a little where the boy had been all the time, and what was the matter with him. His pride had not allowed him to ask Mrs. Ripon any questions.

'No one like Mr. Lyon now!' he repeated sarcastically, but with a tinge of melancholy. 'And yet there was a time, Robin, when I was more to you than he. Ah well: the way of the world. I suppose it is all right. At any rate it is best for you as it is, my boy.'

With all his failings Edward Gower was a generous-hearted man, and he was sincerely glad that the boy was in good hands; though it was not in human nature not to feel a little his desertion of himself. He went back to his work, and tried to banish all unpleasant memories, and partially succeeded. He had regular employment now, and though his time was not half occupied he earned enough to keep him in comfort and respectability. His rooms were pleasant and quiet, and he lived in a curious sort of mental calm; listlessly watching the current of events.

The evening after his visit to Mrs. Ripon he went out for an aimless walk. Now turning down one street, now another, he sauntered on, neither thinking nor caring where he was going. It was getting late when, on his way home, he stopped at a corner shop, and gazed without interest into the window. Suddenly his eye fell upon a pamphlet bearing a well-known

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name. The title was—'Juvenile Depravity; the Evil and the Remedy,' and beneath it was John Lyon's name. He went into the shop and bought it. As the man gave it him he said: 'Our last copy: this edition has been bought up like wildfire, I hear.'

'It touches the mark, I suppose.'

'It is likely to do so. He is well up on that subject.'

'So I suppose,' said Gower, dryly. Pocketing the book he went out, and came face to face with Lyon himself. Both paused instinctively, and then with a slight inclination of his head Gower turned away. How it happened he never could tell; either he trod on something slippery, or slipt on the curb-stone, but the next moment he fell, and saw close to him the wheels of a cab. He heard a shout, and with a shudder closed his eyes, thinking his last moment had come. Then as if in a dream he looked up, and saw a little figure clinging to the horse's head. He staggered to his feet, and as Lyon's strong hand was laid on the rein the little figure dropped, a senseless heap, upon the ground.

The frightened driver backed his horse, but seeing Gower rise unhurt broke into a volley of abuse. 'What did he mean by throwing himself under the horse's feet like that? If he'd been run over he'd have called it murder, he supposed, and summonsed him!'

He would have gone on, but Lyon peremptorily told him to hold his tongue and drive to a surgeon in the next street. A bystander hastened to open the cab door, and he was about to get in with his senseless burden when Gower stepped forward and stopped him.

'Is he dead?'

'No: he saved your life; come and see what can be done for his.'

Without a word Gower followed him in and shut the door. He did not speak, but sat with his gaze riveted on the little white face on Lyon's arm. The surgeon was at home, and came at once into the surgery. In a quiet methodical way he went to work and made the necessary examination, and then looked up pleasantly.

'Very little harm done here, Mr. Lyon. Ah! "Richard's himself again."'

He spoke the last words to the boy, who had opened his eyes. Willie smiled, and looked at Lyon anxiously, and then turned

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his head and saw Gower. In a moment his face lighted up, and he tried to rise.

'No: you can't do that just yet,' said the surgeon, laughing. 'You would like to go and have a game of cricket, I daresay. Well, you must wait a bit for that.'

'Then I can take him home?' said Lyon, with a sense of relief.

'Certainly: unless he would like to stay and help me. I want a boy to run my errands,' was the joking reply. 'There is no real injury: only a shock, and a few bruises. He will be all right in a day or two.'

Holding Gower's hand tightly in his, as if he feared to let him go, Willie leaned back in the cab, but did not speak till he was lying on the couch in Lyon's room, alone with Gower; for Lyon left them.

Then it all came out. With trembling lips, but a brave look in his eyes, he told the whole history of that unfortunate night; how in jealousy and fear he had opened the note and read it, and then destroyed it. He hid nothing, and Gower listened with mingled feelings of surprise and shame; shame for his own past. And yet he could not quite understand it; Lyon had acknowledged receiving the message. The thought crossed him that the boy was raving, that the confession was the result of delirium.

As if he read the thought, Willie looked up with beseeching eyes.

'I am speaking the truth! indeed, sir, I am! Won't you believe me?'

'But Mr. Lyon told me himself that he had received it—that you gave it to him,' said Gower, in perplexity.

'Oh no! not that one, sir! I did give him a message once and said it came from you. It was only a bit of impudence of mine, and he never thought it came from you till he saw you and you spoke about a message.'

'What a game of cross purposes!' said Gower, his lips relaxing into a smile, despite his annoyance. 'I spoke of that note, Robin, not of any verbal message. I thought he looked rather astonished, and no wonder. He must have thought me off my head! Why have you not told me this before?'

'Because I hated him,' whispered the boy. 'I know it was wicked, but I always was wicked.'

'Not quite always, Robin. I remember a boy who did many

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a kind deed. I never could quite understand how you came to leave me like that, though. Mr. Lyon must have had some influence over you.'

'Mr. Lyon!' echoed the boy, in his turn surprised. 'He had nothing to do with it. I ran away from him, and went to Birmingham after you.'

'Come! this is getting exciting,' said Gower, with a comical air of resignation. 'I did not know I'd been to Birmingham at all! When did I go, and what did I go for? By the way, are you sure you are awake, Robin?'

'I thought you'd gone: Forset said you had, and that you wished me to go after you. I went to see for myself, and you had left your old room, so I thought it was true.'

'Look here, Robin! you had better begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it! I can make nothing of it as it is.'

So the boy began at the day he had left Gower, and told all that had happened to him since; not in detail, but the principal events.

'And all this time I have been imagining you under Mr. Lyon's fostering care!' cried Gower. 'Why, Robin lad, you have had quite a series of adventures. But I do not understand now how it is you are with Mr. Lyon. Did he find you?'

'No, sir; I was ill, and there was no one else to go to, so I came to him. I knew he'd take care of me.'

'But I thought you hated him.'

The boy's face flushed. 'I don't think I ever really hated him; at least, I did, and I didn't. I couldn't help liking him, and that made me angry with myself, and I tried all the more to hate him. But he was so good to me, sir! No one else would have done what he did, after I bit him, too! I was bound to love him.'

'All the better for you,' said Gower, moodily.

Willie looked anxiously at him. 'Are you very angry with me, sir?' he asked, humbly. 'I know I was a bad little chap, but I was so afraid he'd make you hate me.'

'No, I am not angry. It was wrong of you, of course, but we will pass over that. Beside, you have made up for it to-night, as far as I am concerned; though I don't know that you did me any real kindness, Robin.'

The boy looked at him with wistful eyes, but did not speak. With an intelligence beyond his years, he understood the feeling that prompted the words, and dared attempt no answer.

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Lyon came in and sent him to bed, and he went with a light heart. As soon as he had left the room, Gower turned to Lyon with outstretched hand.

'Willie has told me all, Lyon,' he said, in a tone which told of mingled feelings. 'I have wronged you, though unintentionally. Let the dead past bury its dead.'

There was need for no more words; they understood each other too well. By mutual though tacit agreement the past was dropped, except that Gower told him something of his life; where he had lived, and what he had been doing.

'And now I am close by you, so perhaps we may meet sometimes. But times have changed with you, I hear. Is it true that you have become editor? That you are author, I know; if it had not been for your pamphlet we should not have met to-night.'

'Let us be thankful for the pamphlet,' replied Lyon, with his rare smile. 'Yes; I have left my old quarters, and am in a more congenial atmosphere.'

'And have grand carriage visitors, pawing horses, powdered footmen, etc.,' said Gower, with a shrug of his shoulders.

'No visitors of mine. They came to see the "Home," as they call it, and Mrs. Willett showed them over. I was not here.'

'Some men are born to rise; you are one of the lucky few, I suppose. Perhaps one of these days I shall stand before you with fear and trembling, having submitted a cherished MS. to your autocratic fiat! You must drop all your quixotic notions of universal charity now; there is nothing more unbefitting an editor's chair. Why, man, your heart will bleed to death at the sight of all the despair and woe you will have to bring upon your rejected contributors. Give it up, Lyon; give it up, before the evil day cometh.'

'I shall have to engage you to hold communication with the rejected,' replied Lyon. 'Will the post suit you?'

'It would sit so heavy on my soul, methinks the gods themselves would pity me!' returned Gower, with comic dismay. '"A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind;" I should have too much sympathy with the poor beggars.'

All restraint was fast wearing off, and when later on the two men parted, it was with the old cordial hand-shake and on the old familiar terms. No stranger would have guessed that they had been parted and estranged; and probably with no other man of his acquaintance could Gower have acted as he

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did. There was that in Lyon which made him feel that the high, natural tone of his character would allow no small feeling of personal pique to hold sway for one moment, and with such a nature, the highest characteristics of his own had full play. In acknowledging himself to have been in fault he knew that he was placing himself in no false position; his words would go for what they were worth.

He went down the street with a free, firm step, which told its own tale to Lyon's keen perception. Even a man's tread reveals something of his character, and Lyon remembered well the slouching, undecided gait of former times, and was quick to note the change.

It was with a feeling of real pleasure that he went back to his own room. Friendship, implying as it did a certain amount of equality, had rarely fallen to his share, and in Gower he had found, despite his one great failing, 'that rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness that piqued each with the presence of power and of consent in the other.' He had not willed it to be so: in the degraded, drink-stupefied man he had first met there had been little to attract; but gradually pity had given place to regard. There was much to admire and like in the genial, frank nature of the man, and his pleasant, cordial manner had a charm of its own. Intellectually they were pretty equally balanced, and each had the consciousness that the other knew but one law of honour and truth.

As Lyon passed Willie's door he heard the boy's voice calling him, and went in. He was sitting up, evidently waiting for him, and his face and hands were burning with the fever of excitement.

'Mr. Lyon, I can't go to sleep till you tell me I've undone it all!' he said, feverishly. 'I've been listening for Mr. Gower to go, to call you in. Have I undone it all?'

'As far as Mr. Gower and I are concerned, I think you have, Willie. About yourself, my boy, I cannot say.'

'What did I do to myself, sir?'

'We cannot do a wrong deed without hurting ourselves far more than we hurt another. Did you ever think of that, Willie?'

The boy was silent. Of the law of moral cause and effect he knew little. The law of the land punished theft; *therefore* he would keep his thieving secret, and not because in itself it was a wrong. A lie was but the means to gain a certain end,

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good, it might be, in itself; therefore the lie was right and justifiable. These were the workings of his untutored moral perceptions; of higher laws his knowledge was small and faint. But he was an apt pupil, and one sentence to him was more than a sermon to many.

'It is a law of our nature,' said Lyon, quietly, 'that to give is to receive. If we give evil we take evil; it must come back to us in some way. Do you understand?'

'I think I do, sir.'

And he did to a certain extent. A faint glimmering of the truth was breaking upon the moral darkness which surrounded him, showing him by its dim light the outlines of the grand basis of morality. The very fact of his eagerness to undo the wrong he had done told this.

Lyon was now fully established in his new sphere of work, and found it far more congenial than his former one. The society was also in working order, and was commencing operations with a vigour which augured well for the future. Already it had the co-operation and sympathy of many of the leading men of the times, and Mr. Chester was most sanguine as to the result.

For some time after the renewal of their friendship, Lyon and Gower met but seldom; but gradually the latter fell into the way of dropping in for an hour the last thing at night, and so the old intimacy began to grow up again.

One Sunday evening he strolled languidly in just as Lyon was despatching his boys to a children's service held in the neighbourhood, and asked him to go for a walk.

'Sundays are such an intolerable bore!' he said, with a yawn. 'One doesn't know what to do with oneself. It's too hot for church, and too late for a trip into the country! the places of amusement are all shut, and London is in its most depressing mood—for me. Come out, there is a good fellow.'

'I have a service of my own to-night, but not for an hour. I am at your disposal till then,' replied Lyon.

They went out into the close hot streets, where there seemed not one cooling breath of air, and walked hurriedly to escape from the narrow confines into the broader freedom of the parks.

Suddenly Gower paused, and with a comical look in his eyes turned to Lyon.

'After all, Lyon, if you don't mind a sermon, I don't. There is a fellow preaching in that church whom I rather want

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to hear. Shall we slip in for half an hour? We can sit by the door and come out if we don't like it.'

'Who is he? I never heard of a star of any particular magnitude in this part of the world.'

'I daresay not. I have private reasons for feeling an interest in him.'

Lyon said no more. In all probability, he thought the clergyman had been an acquaintance, or perhaps, friend, in the brighter days of the past.

They went in, and sat down by the door. Folding his arms, Lyon prepared to listen, but the preacher's manner was not impressive, and the first few common-place sentences sent his thoughts wandering. However, as the sermon proceeded, his attention was roused, and at last he was forced to listen with interest and pleasure. He liked the style; the language was pure and Saxon, the metaphors striking and brilliant, and the lessons taught, those of the Gospel, as he himself recognised it.

An old man in the pew in front annoyed him by continually turning his head to look at Gower. For some time he took no notice, but at last glanced at his companion to see what was attracting the old man's notice. To his surprise he was sitting with folded arms and shut eyes, his shoulders shaking with some suppressed emotion. He went back to the sermon, but could not fix his attention. From time to time he glanced round, but Gower was still in the same attitude. At last the old man's patience became exhausted, and bending over he whispered, 'This ain't the place to laugh, mister.'

Opening his eyes, Gower encountered the old man's reproving gaze and Lyon's astonished one. Seizing his hat he left the church, and Lyon followed.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

'WHAT IS SHE TO ME?'

'GOWER!'

'Well,' retorted Gower, '"Cahn' a fellah like fellah's own wit?" Otherwise, may I not laugh at my own sermons? It was you who upset my gravity.'

'What did I do?'

'To sit there and hear the good man roll out with such evident satisfaction and self-complacency my rounded sentences and polished phrases was enough; but I could have managed that if it had not been for you. You liked the sermon! I could see it in your face. You were interested, pleased, absorbed! Come now, confess: you were agreeably surprised? You did not expect such a sermon in such a place?'

'No: that I certainly did not,' said Lyon, laughing. 'So it is one of your sermons, is it? You have missed your vocation.'

'I should have made a capital preacher? The fellow little knew who was listening! Do you know it was such an awful temptation to me to anticipate him, and wind up some of those long sentences before he could get the words out of his mouth. Fancy the consternation of the devout congregation.'

'Fancy mine if I had been called as a witness to prove your sanity!'

'Don't you think I am conferring a great boon on that congregation by giving it such an "excellent discourse"? When you come to think of it I am quite a public benefactor. Out with your thoughts, man: I can see they are not very complimentary.'

'I was wondering how much of the sermon was your own,' replied Lyon.

'The insolence! the—the cheek of the fellow!' cried Gower,

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with mock indignation. 'I beg leave to state that it is all mine, sir: every word of it. There is not one stolen sentence.'

'Nor sentiment?'

'Oh, as for sentiments, they are pretty much alike all over Christendom. I don't profess to manufacture new doctrine.'

'Then I am to understand that the doctrine in the sermon is yours by adoption; it *is* yours.'

'I see what you are driving at. Let us change the subject,' replied Gower, shrugging his shoulders. 'We have lost our walk.'

'Yes; and I must leave you. My time is nearly up.'

'I am developing a taste for sermons! Most marvellous change! Having listened to my own I will now come and listen to yours, my friend. We will exchange criticism afterwards.'

'You will find no polished oratory in mine. Still, come if you like,' said Lyon.

The assembled congregation was very different from the one they had just left. It consisted of the class commonly spoken of as 'roughs,' and their appearance did not belie their name. The sermon too, if sermon it could be called, was widely different, though there was a certain resemblance of subject, and the text was the same.

'How came you to take that text?' asked Gower, as they walked home. 'Was it an extempore address?'

'To a certain extent. Of course I have studied the subject, but I did not intend to take it up to-night. Your sermon suggested ideas which I thought I had better make use of at once. That is how I came to take that text.'

'Lyon, you are a mystery to me!' cried Gower, impetuously. 'What pleasure on earth do you find in preaching to those roughs? No one thinks more of intellectual pleasures than you, and yet, while the finest minds in England are pouring out their wit and wisdom you calmly prefer to waste your time among the lowest of our *canaille!* It is just that—sheer waste!'

'I hope not,' replied Lyon, dreamily. 'I am doing it with a definite aim.'

'And that is——?'

'To show those poor fellows something of the light which is shining. Their lot is dark enough, God knows: but it can be lightened.'

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'Dark because full of crime and sin and ignorance. It is the natural result.'

'Exactly: and therefore someone must try to teach them the way up. There are few enough to do it.'

'That is your monomania! Why should you take upon yourself such a responsibility? Besides, it is all so vague.'

'What is?'

'It—religion—everything of that sort. Who knows the truth?'

'I do.'

'Umph! candour if not modesty! Ah yes, I remember the old theory. How is it acting?'

'As far as I have gone it is a success.'

'And is life still a satisfying fact?'

'Upon the whole—yes. And yet each day brings increase of aspiration. I think the longer a man lives the more he needs: I am not content with the realized dreams of a year ago.'

'The fact is, the more you have the more you want. At that rate where will you stop.'

'What is the limit? To what extent may a man aspire?'

'"There is no boundary to a man's life but the boundless: he steps from the finite to the infinite. All things are possible to him who has faith and courage." There is an answer after your own heart. Do you believe it?'

'Do you?'

'In certain moods—yes: in others—no. It is true enough for some: for you for instance.'

'And not for you?'

'I do not say so. Lyon, I have not touched one drop of spirits since the early spring.'

Lyon did not answer, but there was that in his face which impelled Gower to go on. 'Certain influences were brought to bear upon me then, which forced me to make one more struggle for liberty. Ah! what a struggle it has been.'

'But it has been successful!'

'Up to the present. And yet, though I have conquered so far I distrust myself. I am every now and then haunted by the fear of a second fall; and if it comes, farewell hope for ever!'

'Then it must not come,' said Lyon, quietly, but with reassuring confidence. 'You are gathering strength every day, and remember no one, not even the devil himself, can drag you down against your will.'

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'Lately,' continued Gower, all the life and buoyancy gone out of his voice, 'I have been able to banish the hideous spectre. Life has partaken somewhat of the old brighter hues. I have looked forward to a restoration of much that has been lost: position, home, and friends. But this morning a most sudden and powerful temptation came, and in the struggle to conquer it I lost all faith and courage. My landlady asked me to go into her room to see some old prints they are very proud of, and on the table stood my old foe. I looked at it,—it fascinated me,—and seeing my fixed gaze she poured some out and offered it to me. Lyon, can you imagine the feelings of a poor starved wretch, looking through the bars of his cell upon a table loaded with dainties? And yet I won! the iron bars of my will were strong enough for once. That is why I came to you to-night: I dared not trust myself.'

For some minutes the two men were silent: and then Gower went on with a laugh that had no ring of mirth.

'I have a good mind to advertise for a keeper! Can you recommend one? One with stout muscles and stouter heart.'

'I can recommend something much better; you are too much alone, and prey upon yourself. Come and lodge with me, and go in for plenty of work and plenty of exercise. I will promise that Mother Willett shall not fleece you, and there is no lodging-house cat.'

Again Gower laughed, but Lyon detected a touch of amusement and something like hope.

'You haven't any room to spare.'

'Yes, I have. But I am going to leave again.'

Gower elevated his eyebrows. 'Where to now?'

Lyon sighed. 'My small plan is assuming large proportions. A friend of Mr. Chester's, a Miss Randolph, has taken up the idea, and is carrying it out under my direction on a much greater scale. You know the two large houses adjoining Turner's? She has bought them both, and they are being rapidly thrown into one to make a commodious and convenient home for my little lads and others like them.'

'And you give your post up?'

'So far that a regular master is to be appointed to superintend: but I continue a general supervision. I shall be the consulting head, but he will do the work. I could not undertake it.'

'Then where will you live?'

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'The house adjoining the Home is small and convenient. I have taken it, and Mother Willett will continue to be my housekeeper. The Home will require a stronger matron. Now, you see, there will be plenty of room for you; and we can both have our private rooms.'

It was evident that Gower liked the idea, but he did not reply at once. 'Think of it,' said Lyon. 'It will be a genuine pleasure to me, Gower; you know that.'

Yes, he knew it, and it gratified him. There was more equality between them now than in the days of their first acquaintance. Each had risen, though in different ways. Lyon was more the man of the world; Gower less the man of impulse and mood; less the weak victim, more self-reliant, and self-possessed. He was no longer humiliated by a sense of shame for his own degradation and weakness; and as a natural consequence of self-respect came the increased power to win the respect of others which gave him additional confidence. He no longer shrank from Lyon; and now that once more the haunting fear had returned he instinctively turned to him to find in the power of friendship a barrier to his fall.

Having told this much it was not difficult to complete the confidence, and that night Lyon learned much of the past, with its weary struggles and depressing temptations.

'They come upon me with almost overpowering force, and I fear that in a weak moment I may yield,' he said. 'I sometimes think there is no cure for confirmed intemperance.'

'And I know that there is,' replied Lyon. 'There are few habits, if any, that cannot be cured, and intemperance is but a habit. Go to history and read what it says there. Take the lives of men of our own time, and then say, if you can, that intemperance is incurable. It is nothing of the sort. Let us take it as a disease, and treat it according to the first physicians. If I were a doctor I think I know how I should treat it.'

'How?' asked Gower, with interest.

'Put yourself under my care and let me try my way. Why not? It cannot do harm, if it do no good.'

'Will you douche me, shower-bath me, or use incantations strange and dark?' replied Gower, with a faint smile. 'Is it necessary for me to have faith?'

'You have it.'

'Lyon, you are a wizard! Yes, I have faith, and I will tell you why; you have too much common sense to bring to bear

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upon me any of the ordinary twaddle of ignorant abstainers. What do they know of the fiery temptation of confirmed habits? Nothing; and yet from their unassailed pinnacle they presume to offer advice and lay down rules with all the assurance which characterises impertinent ignorance. They think if they can get a man to sign the pledge he is saved; and all he has to do is to take up a pen and write. What do they know of the ceaseless craving for what seems life itself? Fools! If ever I conquer, I will——'

'What?' said Lyon, as he suddenly paused.

'It is time enough to talk of that when I *have* conquered. Let me hear your plan.'

'It is not quite matured. But I bargain for one thing—that you let me have a fair trial.'

'And you undertake to effect a cure?'

'I hope so. I have great faith.'

'So be it. Dr. Lyon, I place myself in your hands.'

'Unreservedly?'

'Unreservedly.'

'Then meet me on Wednesday morning at King's Cross Station,' said Lyon.

'What do you mean?'

Lyon laughed. 'Only this; I feel the need of rest and change: I have been working too hard this last year, and it is beginning to tell upon me. Mr. Chester has ordered me off, and Wednesday night, I hope, will find me among the Yorkshire hills. Will you come too?'

A sudden light flashed into Gower's eyes, and his face underwent a perfect metamorphosis. All the listless despondency disappeared as if by magic, and once more he looked young and handsome, and buoyant with life.

'Yorkshire? Yes, we will go!' he cried, with a ring of enthusiasm in his voice which accorded well with his almost boyish *abandon* as he paced Lyon's room. 'The dear old hills! Lyon, I was born under the shadow of old Pennegent. I climbed its rough sides before I knew that the world was round. Let us go and be boys again! Have you ever spent a day on a Yorkshire moor? do you know what it is to be intoxicated with the sweet moorland air? to go mad with freedom and bewildering solitude? When the sky and distant hills, the wide moor around you are yours and yours alone, and you can shout and wake no human echo, and tell your secrets

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to the skies and never hear them told again! I remember once lying on a purple moor, with my head shrouded mid the heather, when such a delirium came over me that I grew eloquent and shouted to old Ingleboro's crest to stoop and tell me some of its dead secrets! I raved, but did not care; who was there to hear! If there be ever any excuse for insanity it is when a man finds himself alone on a Yorkshire moor: miles from human habitation. Then it is that the germs of a strange and incomprehensible madness spring suddenly into maturity, and the spirit and essence of life course wildly through one's veins. Ah! talk of the elixir of life! find out how to preserve and concentrate the free wild air of the heatherland, and we may laugh at and defy old age, with his attendant train of ills, and evils, and death! It's a bonnie land, Lyon.'

'Very satisfactory,' observed Lyon. 'The first dose has acted beyond my expectations. I think I may safely promise you a complete cure.'

'You old quack!' cried Gower, sinking into an arm-chair, with a flush on his face and a gleam in his eyes. 'Here I have been doing the romantic to rouse the enthusiasm of your cold blood, and lo! you talk of *doses!* Fangh! Ah, Lyon, I'll dose you up yonder till you cry me mercy. Doses thirty miles long, over hill and dale! You shall stand on lofty Ingleboro' and drink in deep draughts of youth and inspiration. You shall descend into the bowels of the earth, and listen to the beating of the old hill's heart, down among her caverns and deep mysteries. Do you know what a Pot is?'

'I think there is one in the kitchen,' replied Lyon. 'I fancy it is what they boil potatoes in.'

'Scoffer! Wait till you have stood on the brink of a Yorkshire Pot,—of "Hell's mouth,"—and have looked down into its darkness, and listened for the splash of the pebble which left your hand a minute ago and has not reached the water yet. Wait till you have been suddenly pulled up in a race across a wide stretch of table-land and have found yourself on the very edge of a gaping chasm, and lying down have looked with dizzy eyes down, down, down, and yet have found no resting-place for the straining gaze, and with beating heart have listened to the far-off sound of the black waters—you *know* they are black—rushing among rocks and caverns which no human eye has ever seen. Then scoff at a Pot if you will!'

'Nay, I am far more likely to become an enthusiast, though

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I am no canny Yorkshireman, proud of my hills and heather. You do well to be proud of them.'

'Not proud: it is not that exactly. It claims no especial features to rouse pride. Scotland bears off the palm for heather and hills. But I suppose most men have a lingering affection for the place of their birth, if it be also the scene of their boyhood's tragedies and comedies. What county man are you?'

'Devon: but I know little of it. My father left before I was old enough to receive impressions.'

'I didn't know you ever had a father,' said Gower. 'I thought you grew in the streets of London, somewhere between St. James' and St. Giles', and the two had been quarrelling over you ever since. By the way, what is to be done with Robin? Is he to go to Miss Randolph's Home?'

'That is one thing I want to talk to you about. I look upon him as your *protégé*.'

'So he ought to be: that is to say, he has a claim upon me, and I recognise it. But he is in your hands, and I should not think of interfering. He is a clever, intelligent little fellow.'

'Of course he must go to school. I am thinking of keeping him and Dick under my own care still, and when they are old enough having them in the printing office.'

'A good plan. But remember one thing. I am responsible for all expenses connected with Robin: this I will not relegate to anyone.'

'I wish I could send the two into the country for a few weeks: but I don't know where at present. We must wait and see,' said Lyon.

The next morning he received a five pound note, with the words written on a slip of paper: 'The price of a few weeks of fresh air for the boys.' He knew from whom it came. But there was still a difficulty. He had not then a single place where he felt he could send the boys with safety. Not being quite sure of Willie, he did not feel justified in sending him among other children. He was still undecided at noon, when passing St. Paul's he saw Mr. Wycherley and his daughter going into the cathedral. For a moment he hesitated, and then went in after them.

'I thought you had gone out of town,' said Mr. Wycherley, as they shook hands. 'Mr. Chester told us you were going last week.'

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'I did talk of it, but was detained. I am going on Wednesday to Yorkshire for a few weeks.'

'Everyone is deserting London, and quite right too. I do not know who would stay here this weather if they could help it,' replied Mr. Wycherley, fretfully. He looked careworn and old, and stooped more than Lyon had ever seen him do before. Alison's face too, he noticed, was anxious and wistful. There was an absorbed look in her eyes, and troubled lines round her mouth which told their own tale. At that moment Mr. Wycherley caught sight of a gentleman near one of the pillars, and with a hasty apology to Lyon went up to him, greeting him heartily.

'It is an old friend of papa's,' explained Alison. 'He wrote to say he was passing through London, and asked papa to meet him here for half an hour, as he had not time to call. You are not keeping me,' she added, seeing the thought in his face. 'They do not want me, and I shall not join them.'

'Mr. Wycherley does not look well,' said Lyon after a pause.

'No: he is not well. I am trying to persuade him to go to the seaside, but cannot prevail upon him, though he says he so much dislikes London in the hot weather. He is very anxious about my brother; we have not heard of him for so long.'

'He is abroad, I believe?' said Lyon, who had heard her speak of her brother in America before.

'Yes: he was never a good correspondent, but it is such a very long time now since he wrote, and we—and papa is getting nervous.'

'Foreign letters are often lost. But perhaps your brother is coming home and does not think it worth while to write.'

'That thought crossed me, but he has had time to come home over and over again.'

'Have you no friend to whom you could write and make inquiries?'

'Not one. Guy did say he thought of coming home the early part of next year. Well, we must wait, and hope.'

The last words were spoken to herself more than to another, and looking down upon her Lyon was struck by a curious, fleeting expression that seemed familiar to him. It puzzled him; but it was gone in a minute, when she looked up and spoke again.

'How is Willie Winter, Mr. Lyon?'

'He is better, but the heat is against him. He has been on

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my mind all the morning. I want to send him into the country, but cannot manage it very well. Not that funds are lacking, but I do not care to send him anywhere by himself just now.'

'Why not send him with Mrs. Ripon? I am sure she would be only too glad to do anything to oblige you.'

'But where is Mrs. Ripon going?' asked Lyon.

'To a little village in Kent, to a farm-house. It belongs to Wilson's uncle, and he is willing to let her take Mrs. Ripon and "as many children as she pleased,"' explained Alison: she did not add 'provided they paid,' which was the case, nor that she had settled that part of the business herself.

'When are they going?'

'To-morrow, I think. I am sure you had better send the boy, Mr. Lyon. I will see that it is made all right at the farm.'

He understood what she meant, and thanked her with a look. 'I had an anonymous five pound note sent me this morning for the two boys, so it is only a question of *where*, not *how*. Will you speak to Wilson, Miss Wycherley? and I will see Mrs. Ripon to-night.'

'Yes, I will; and I will write and let you know what she says. I am glad you are going away yourself. I am sure you need it. I wonder if you will go near our old home.'

'Where is it?'

She told him, and her face saddened as she described the scenes which were evidently so dear.

'It has been in the possession of a Wycherley for five hundred years, and now it belongs to a *Jones!*' she said, with a slight smile. 'I believe he is a Spenser Jones though, and *of course* that makes all the difference.'

There was no mistaking the quiet sarcasm, and Lyon carried the memory of it away with him.

'Full of caste prejudice and pride,' he thought, as he hurried away to make up for lost time. 'It is only natural, I suppose.'

He tried to busy himself in work, but for once had little control over his thoughts. The past would so persistently rise before him. He saw himself a little hard-working lad, running about the streets of London, fatherless, and almost friendless. He saw his lonely evenings, when, creeping close to the fire, he used to brood over his books, picked up at some cheap second-hand stall. And then his growing youth, his manhood, and still the same story. Books, books, books his only companions.

'While other men have had the advantage of mingling with

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their equals, of measuring their intellectual standard by that of others, I have fought my way up alone. Of the courtesies of life, of its refinements and the chivalry of its men, I know nothing. No wonder she looks down on me, the rough, uncultured, self-made man!'

There was unconscious bitterness in his tone. Proud and sensitive, he over-rated the value of the one thing he did not possess, while under-rating the higher qualities which were his by right. In the humility of that sensitiveness he did not see that from his boyhood he had been preserved by two infallible safeguards from contact with the lowering influences of his station. His creed of high honour and spotless truth had been an effectual barrier between him and the degradation of sin, and in the constant companionship of the master minds of his own and past ages he had risen into a world of noble thoughts, which precluded all possibility of mental inferiority. A self-made man, as the world calls it, but as truly an educated one as any who pass through our colleges, and with an innate refinement which many a haughty father and stately mother would purchase at the cost of a small fortune for their graceless sons. Not in vain had John Lyon taken self-cultivation as the first law of life.

He tried to throw off the unwonted depression, scarcely understanding its cause. 'What does it matter that she looks down upon me?' he asked himself with irritation. 'What is she to me?'

It is a dangerous sign when a man has to school himself into indifference, winding up with the annoyed and would-be extinguishing question: 'What is she to me?'

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

'THE ATOMS: WHO MADE THEM?'

'On some heigh hill now tack yer stand,
And view the plats of dark green land
Which down the valley lie:
Then to the north just turn yersel',
Whar Pennyghent and Fountain's fell
Rear up their crests on high,

View Stainforth Scarr's bold rugged wo's,
And then the bonny wood that grows
An' blossoms down below it.'

Tom Twistleton.

AT the picturesque and most un-English looking little town of Settle, which nestles under the Attermire range, Lyon and Gower took up their head-quarters for a few days. It was a familiar spot to the latter, but to Lyon was full of the charm of novelty.

And now Gower fulfilled his threat, and led the way over hill and moor many a mile, but failed to accomplish his purpose. He had expected among his native wilds to prove superiority in at least walking and climbing capabilities. But Lyon only laughed, and at the end of a long day's march would propose another mile or two, or sit down comfortably to his supper while Gower was panting on the wooden settle.

'I believe you are made of iron!' cried Gower, after one of these long excursions. 'Do you know what it is to be tired? One would think you were a trained mountaineer! I'll try you at Ingleboro' to-morrow, which is a little stiffer than anything we have had yet.'

They had been there about a week, and already there was a perceptible difference in both, but more especially in Gower, who was rapidly losing his stoop and regaining his old freedom of bearing. Wherever he went he won golden opinions, and Lyon smiled to see the undisguised admiration of the pretty country girls. It was not often such a pair of handsome blue

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eyes laughed down into theirs, or such courtly words replied to their simple speech. But those who chatted gaily with Gower were afraid of Lyon, somewhat to his amusement.

'We have changed places,' said Gower, with comical, amused delight. 'I am the genial, popular philanthropist! you are only a stern-browed, reserved traveller, who could not coin a pleasant word to save his life.'

'A complimentary one you mean: compliments are not in my line,' replied Lyon, who did not in the least care. He had too much to think of to trouble about his reputation for gallantry. His plan was evidently succeeding, and that was his chief care. Not once had Gower seemed to give even a thought to the temptation of his life, and he was daily gaining strength. They did not refer to the object of the tour, for such they were making it, taking the chief objects of interest in the West Riding, and then going on to the lakes. But entire success was not so near as they both imagined.

It was a burning summer's day, when once more the battle had to be fought. They had met a couple of tourists, pleasant, gentlemanly young fellows, who had been in the lake district some weeks, and had told them of places worth seeing beyond the range of ordinary visitors. They were resting under the shade of the trees, when a servant from the hotel below came up with iced champagne. One of the young men drew the cork, and pouring out a glassful handed it to Gower. Lyon was standing with his back to him, and hearing the click of glass turned in time to see him lift the sparkling draught which meant to him so much. For the moment he was paralysed: the quick thought 'Dare I interfere?' flashed across his mind, and in an agony he raised his hand with a momentary gesture of entreaty. He dared not speak.

With the hot blood coursing through his veins, with parched lips longing for the cooling draught, with a heart beating wildly with the excitement of the moment, Gower looked up and met his silent, speechless gaze. Its almost passionate earnestness arrested his hand, and with the glass close to his lips he paused. What a world of doubt, fear, and *prayer* was crowded into that one brief minute! Then with a swift shudder passing from head to foot he dropped the glass upon the turf and strode away. With a few words of apology, Lyon followed, and overtook him. Without speaking they walked on together for some distance. Gower's face was white and painfully drawn,

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GOWER LOOKED UP AND MET HIS SILENT SPEECHLESS GAZE.'—*See p.* 396.

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and Lyon knew by the nervous twitching of his mouth that he was deeply moved. They had hired a little boat to cross the lake, and it was lying on the still water by the little jetty, waiting for them. Taking his place Gower took up his oar and pulled away as if for dear life. He was evidently working off some of his overwrought feeling, and respecting the conflict, Lyon rowed in silence. On the opposite side they landed, and giving the boat to the little lad in charge, started up the hill. At a point where a magnificent view burst suddenly upon them they simultaneously stopped, and Gower drew a deep breath.

'That is over! thank God,——and you,' he said. 'Ah! Lyon, how little we know of our own strength till we are tried! No doubt to many it seems the easiest thing in the world to refuse a glass of wine: but the devil himself was lurking in that champagne! I know he was. No other power could have given it such marvellous fascination.'

He laughed, but it was with a trembling lip, and the agitated look of one who had escaped a great danger.

'I was nearly gone! One step further and Edward Gower would have been lost for ever. It is true, Lyon: I firmly believe that if I fall into those depths again, there will be no rising out of them for me. Do you know what your look said?'

'I know what my thought was.'

'If ever a look spoke, yours did! another moment and it would have been too late, but, as plainly as words could have spoken, your eyes cried out, "For God's sake, stop!" It sounded like a sudden cry of "*danger!*" and startled me out of the fatal trance. I had lost sight of everything but the one thing; my senses were steeped in the intoxication of expectation; nothing in life had any charm beside that sparkling, tempting draught! and I should have yielded, but—Lyon, I tell you, you must have spoken! I heard the words.'

'You felt them. I did not speak.'

'So be it. At any rate you made me conscious of them. Thank you, old fellow.'

'You will not want my danger signal much longer,' said Lyon, with his pleasant smile. 'A little while and it will be an easy thing to say no.'

'Ah, that I sometimes doubt. Will that time ever come? Why have I such a craving for alcohol of any sort? It seems as if it would never die out.'

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'You have been accustomed to it so long; and as long as there is any portion, no matter how minute, in your body, you will feel that craving for more.'

'And how long is that encouraging state of things to last?'

'Nay, that I cannot tell. This I do know; that every day passed without alcohol lessens the desire; or, rather, the strength of the desire for it. When your system is entirely free from the poison, for such it is, you will be able to look at it with indifference. I doubt if you would have withstood such a temptation two months ago.'

'Or even one. Everything was against me down there; the heat, the very character of the wine itself. Who could resist such a draught on such a day as this?'

'You; at any rate, you did.'

'Small credit to me! Your prescription has a chance of success,' replied Gower.

'Give it a fair trial. We have been up here a fortnight; in another fortnight you will be able to write me a testimonial, I hope. Look at yourself; you are a different man already.'

Gower laughed; his old, light-hearted laugh. 'Do you remember the first night we met, Lyon? I was a disreputable-looking scamp, wasn't I?'

'Yes,' replied Lyon, candidly, 'my landlady thought so, I assure you.'

'Did she keep a sharp look-out on the spoons? Suppose I had been a regular swell-mobsman, or something of that sort? It was a hazardous experiment to take a complete stranger, and such an one as I, home with you. Why did you do it?'

'I saw what you were; I heard the ring of the true metal.'

'It was a good thing for me you did,' replied Gower, frankly. 'It did your powers of discernment credit, though. I was half drunk, I believe, and talked about equality! Oh, shades of my fathers! how you must have laughed at me, Lyon.'

'Not I. There was more truth in it than you knew, perhaps.'

'And the next morning I tried the condescending; but it would not do,' went on Gower, with an amused smile. 'You puzzled me considerably. But you have changed since then, as well as I.'

'Have I?' said Lyon, absently. He was wondering if some one had ever seen in him aught savouring of higher regions than St. Giles.

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'Yes. Lyon, I wonder if you will ever visit me in my own home. Can you fancy me surrounded by all the etcetera of position and means! Me! the dweller in garret lodgings.'

'Easily. I suppose that day will come. What do you intend doing when you go back to town?'

'Nothing; that is to say, nothing fresh. I shall work on, as I have been doing, till the beginning of the year, and then if I find I have control over myself, over my reason, I may go home. I don't know.'

A dreamy look, listless and sad, came over the handsome face, and resting his head on his hand, he gazed in silence over the lake, which lay stretched in placid beauty before them.

'What a host of memories that one word, *home*, calls up,' he said, after a long pause. 'Did I ever tell you about mine, Lyon? No: I never did, but I will one of these days. I got wrong with my father and left home in a passion. The old story, you will say: but not exactly. I made the most of our disagreement in order to hide behind it my greater offence and fall. They never knew how entirely I had lost all self-control: I kept it from them, though they heard many rumours. Ah well! it was best so. May they never know!'

They went from the lakes to the highlands. One day, tired and hot, they sat down in the shade to rest, and leaning back and folding his hands beneath his head Gower fell fast asleep. Presently voices were heard drawing near, and a picnic party came in sight. Lyon hoped they would pass round behind them, but they came straight on and passed in front. He saw numerous glances cast at the unconscious Gower, and smiled as he thought of his indignation if he but awoke and found himself the cynosure of so many eyes. They passed, all but two men, who followed slowly in the rear. One of them, a handsome young fellow, looked at Gower and stopped with a sudden exclamation, which, however, he hastily checked. At that moment Gower, opening his eyes, encountered the unwelcome gaze, and started up with a flash of recognition; but it was gone in a moment. Apologising with some confusion the young man walked on.

'I declare I thought it was———,' he said to his companion; but Lyon did not hear the name.

'Have they all been staring at me?' cried Gower, gazing ruefully after the party. 'I will never trust you again, Lyon! I daresay I had my mouth wide open!'

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He tried to pass it off as a joke, but was evidently ill at ease and anxious to avoid another rencontre. He said nothing more about it till the evening, when lying on the turf in front of the inn where they were staying, he suddenly broke into an amused laugh.

'"Open confession is good for the soul!" Lyon, I have had many a boating race with that fellow we saw up on the moor to-day. We were on pretty friendly terms at Oxford years ago. I shall not forget his look of bewilderment in a hurry. When I opened my eyes and saw him staring at me I was just on the point of blurting out his name. It would have been all up then.'

'It was only a partial recognition on his part.'

'No; I am changed indeed. Years and trouble age one!' said Gower, with a slight, mocking smile. 'In another year's time you won't recognise me perhaps.'

'You must undergo a pretty complete metamorphosis then.'

'We shall see. I don't believe Lisle would have recognised me a year ago.'

'No; I do not think he would. But you can scarcely charge years and trouble with that. You look years younger than you did then, Gower.'

'I know it. I am a better looking fellow altogether.'

'Certainly there is nothing like a good opinion of oneself!' said Lyon, looking up with a smile.

The month was over all too soon for both; for though Lyon was ready to go back to work, he had many lingering regrets in leaving the fascinating freedom of the North. He was a passionate lover of nature, and never returned from her beauties to the noisy dingy streets of London without a sigh.

'It has always been a dream of mine to possess some tiny cottage close to a wood, where I can go, and leaving behind me all the turmoil of the city, find quietness and rest in the solitude of my own country home.'

'Not a very impossible ambition,' said Gower. 'Cottages are plentiful and cheap. But do have more than one room, there's a good fellow!'

'I am not so unambitious as you think. My cottage must be something more than a rustic's hut. Wait till you see it.'

'And see you a Sybarite! What'n a sight!'

'One having the charm of novelty at all events. What do you intend doing when you get back to town?'

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'Work, I suppose; the common lot of man! Of common men, that is; there are happy mortals lifted above that fate.'

'Thank heaven I am not one!' said Lyon.

'Ah; your creed is a creed of work; I remember. By the way, where is Rose?'

'Dead.'

'And the other girl?' said Gower, after a pause.

'Nancy? oh, she will come out of it all before long, I think,' said Lyon absently.

'What an odd fellow you are!' cried Gower. 'Are you going on with this sort of work all your life?'

'I hope so. Why not?'

'Nay; there is no why not. It is your vocation, I suppose. A man must follow the bent of his mind.'

'He must first determine the bent. What is yours?'

The only reply was a shrug.

'You will go back to your profession, your friends and home,' continued Lyon. 'In years to come you will look back upon the past twelve months as a strange unreal dream.'

'Likely! with such a very unreal, dreamlike individual as yourself to recall it! Am I to consider myself still under your charge when I get back to town?'

'Certainly; this is only the first prescription. Are you tired of your doctor?'

'Oh dear no! nor shall be while he prescribes such remedies. Seriously, Lyon, I believe there is a chance of success. I have felt less desire for the old curse than ever I did. I think even that one temptation did me good.'

'On the South Sea Islander's principle—that the strength of the enemy he kills passes into himself; so resisted temptation gives strength and resolution. It is true. I have seen a man quivering with agitation from head to foot, with a glass of brandy in his hand, then throw down the temptation, and rise stronger than he had ever been in his life. It is a blessed thing.'

'Which you put down to the credit of God, I suppose?'

'To what would you ascribe it?'

'To the ordinary nature of things; it is bound to be so.'

'And who ordered and arranged the nature of things?'

'You might as well ask me how things came to be at all?'

'How did they?'

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'Fortuitous concourse of atoms!' replied Gower, lightly.

'And the atoms; who made them?'

'Oh come! if you are going in for scientific theology, I give it up,' cried Gower. 'Any other subject you like; but not that. It is my *bête noir*. Lyon, do you know, you are the only man I ever knew, professing to be an out-and-out religious man, whose religion did not bore me. I remember little Winter told me once that you did not force religion on your boys, and that you rarely brought it up in the debating society. How do you make that agree with your principles? I thought you taught religion first, leaving everything else as of minor importance.'

'Would you take a colt fresh from the field, and harness it into a carriage and send your mother and sisters out for a ride?' replied Lyon, quietly.

'Where's the application?'

'My boys and many of the men who come to the debating meetings have an intense dislike to anything bearing on religion. If I were to introduce the subject often, I should pretty nearly empty my class-room of the very boys I want, and the men I am most anxious to reach would not come near the debates.'

'Then you do not accomplish your aim at all.'

'Excuse me. If you will walk into my class-room on Saturday night, or Sunday afternoon, you will see that I do accomplish my aim. On Saturday night you will see the room thronged with men, who have come for the sole purpose of reading and discussing the Bible: on Sunday afternoon I have the boys. It is an understood thing that certain meetings are to attract a certain class; the untrained colts.'

'I see: and you put them in harness by degrees.'

'Yes; all in the Bible classes are recruits from the other meetings; they drop in every week. One brings another, and so it keeps on.'

'Oh, wise as a serpent!' said Gower, with a smile that was half sad. 'See the difference between us; one an idle dreamer all his youth, and now a time-worn man; the other an active energetic doer. After all, Lyon, the doers, the workers, have the best of it. There is a satisfaction in "something accomplished, something done" which the world's drones never experience. Shall I go in for work, and make up for lost time?'

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'If you mean to make anything of your life.'

Gower laughed, and the subject dropped. They left Scotland, and returned to London. Willie met them at the station, his handsome little face radiant with satisfaction, and bright with the glow of returning health. They had not sent word when they were coming, and were surprised to see him.

'I have been here every day since we came back,' he said, in reply to Gower's question. 'It's only two days, though. I thought you'd want me to carry your trunks. So I looked out the trains and came to meet them all.'

'That is what you call making sure of a thing. What have you been doing with yourself all the time?' asked Lyon, pleasantly.

Plenty of things, it seemed. He chatted on unceasingly in a way so different from his old shy manner, that Lyon was surprised. The fact was the boy was more boyish; his stay in the country with good little Dick and the little girls had rubbed off somewhat of the stains of his former life, and given him some of the fresh, unconscious grace of a child; for he was but a child. It seemed to his acute observer that he was not so sharp and precocious; that the large dark eyes had lost their cool speculative look, and daring *insouciance*; and instead, were merry and happy, and full of restless life.

The cab drew up at the new home, and there was a general stir inside. Dick came hobbling out on his crutch, beaming with delight. Sam's brown merry face appeared at the upstairs window, and then down he came like a shot. Mother Willett in her best dress was ready to receive them, and Lyon felt sure he saw Mrs. Ripon peeping round a door. He found out what it all meant when he went upstairs. The two front rooms he had designed as sitting-rooms for himself and Gower, and had left Mother Willett all necessary instructions; but he had not expected to find everything as it was. The rooms were simply but tastefully furnished: he had himself chosen all the appurtenances of Gower's rooms before he left town. But there were things he had not ordered or expected. The muslin curtains were beautifully got up, and gracefully hung; the vases on the mantle-shelf were filled with sweet summer flowers, and on the window sills were boxes full of fragrant mignonette which filled the air with perfume. Loving hands had evidently been at work.

'What good fairies have been here?' asked Lyon, as he looked

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round with observant eyes. 'Dick, my little man, this is your work, I know.'

He spoke of a large basket of virgin cork which, filled with lobelia, hung before one of the windows. Dick's eyes shone.

'We all did something, Mr. Lyon. We did so want to make it a nice coming home. Please say it is.'

'The nicest coming home I ever had, Dick,' he replied, truly pleased and touched. Love is an enchanter, no matter in what guise it appears. Gower's room was decked in similar style, and this was more to Lyon than his own. It seemed to him so good of the little fellows not only to care for his pleasure but his friend's pleasure too; he knew it was for his sake as far as Dick and Sam and the women were concerned. Willie doubtless had done his part out of love to Gower.

'We got the flowers fresh this morning. We knew you'd come to-day,' said Willie, who could not keep still a minute. 'Will you have tea now, Mr. Lyon?'

Lyon held quite a reception that evening. The news of his return spread like wildfire, and numbers of his old friends called just to say how glad they were to get him back amongst them once more. Gower looked on, an interested and amused spectator.

'I did not know you were of such importance,' he said, as at last they were left alone. 'It is a good thing to go away sometimes. There are letters waiting to be read too. Never mind me; I am not company.'

Among the letters was one in a handwriting Lyon had learned to know. He took it up hastily and turned away.

Some strange feeling had prevented him from ever mentioning Alison's name to Gower; he could not bring himself to do it. He shrank from any careless questionings. The letter was very short—merely saying that Mr. Wycherley had been ill, and would like to see Mr. Lyon if he could spare an evening.

Wise as John Lyon was there were some things of which he knew little. Accustomed to analyse his own thoughts and feelings, he overlooked one great possibility, and so walked blindly into a danger he would otherwise have shunned. Not once in his life had he been touched by what the world called love, and now he gave it no thought, taking for granted that he was too old, or too hardened, or too much absorbed in other things perhaps, to succumb to the universal conqueror.

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He went to see Mr. Wycherley that week and found him gloomy and depressed. It had evidently fallen hard upon his daughter, whose face was thin and sorrowful.

'I am so glad you have come,' she said gratefully. 'Papa does not care to see many; only you and Mr. Chester, and *he* is away.'

'Because you are sensible men, and know what to talk about,' interposed the invalid, querulously. 'One might as well live in a desert as this London of yours.'

He was in the low nervous state which perhaps, more than any other, needs sympathy and kindness and as a rule gets less. Lyon knew what it meant, and humoured him with all the tact of which he was master. But while he exerted himself to chase away the gloom, it was not in the father's face he looked for signs of success, though he saw it there too; it was Alison's face which was his study, and he felt well repaid for his evening's work when he saw it brighten, and the cloud disappear from the wistful eyes.

'I did not like to write and ask you to come,' she said, when he rose to leave. 'I knew you would be very busy; but papa wished it so very much, I could not refuse him.'

'I am very glad you did. I will come as often as I can,' replied Lyon. 'It is a real pleasure to me, Miss Wycherley; a pleasant relief from the routine of my life.'

'I will try not to be very much your debtor,' she replied, looking up with a smile which gave her face a sweetness and charm it had never possessed for him before. 'Send me to some other nice old woman, please; I like Mrs. Freeman very much; we are good friends. If you visit my invalid it is but fair that I should visit yours. Did you go anywhere near our old home, Mr. Lyon?'

He fancied there was a look of disappointment in her eyes as he answered in the negative, and he hastened to add,—'I was not alone or I should certainly have gone more to the East of Yorkshire. As it was we kept in the West. You will be pleased to hear that Willie is quite another boy; so well and happy.'

'Mrs. Ripon told me he was better. I saw her yesterday. My little Sybil looks bonnie. Mr. Lyon, have you any idea who her father is? Mrs. Ripon has the idea that you know all about it; but I remember—I think—that you said you knew nothing about him.'

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'No; I know nothing. How came Mrs. Ripon to get such an idea?' said Lyon, in considerable astonishment.

'Something about an envelope. I told her to ask you, and she is going to do so the first time she sees you.'

'I will go round to-morrow,' said Lyon. 'Women get such queer ideas in their heads.'

He was close to Abbey-court the next night, and called to see the little woman.

'What is this about an envelope, Mrs. Ripon,' he asked, tossing Sybil in the air till her golden hair fell about her face like a veil. 'I hear you want to see me.'

'Well, sir, perhaps I ought not to speak about it; but the envelope is plain enough, and he does send such a lot of money that I thought I really ought to tell him,' answered Mrs. Ripon apologetically, taking an envelope out of her workbox.

Lyon took it and looked at it. It was addressed to him, and he remembered receiving it some weeks before. He turned it over, but there was no other address on it.

'The money, a five pound note, came in that; wrapped in a little parcel like, and some more paper round it. I thought maybe he'd told you.'

'What, Sybil's father? No. I do not understand it at all. May I take the envelope?' replied Lyon, considerably puzzled. He put the envelope in his pocket and took it home, but could arrive at no elucidation of the mystery.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE STEP DOWNWARD.

GOWER'S time was well occupied. He had no difficulty in obtaining a lucrative engagement, and seemed to settle down to work with ease. And it was with comparative ease; he felt none of the old restless disinclination to put pen to paper. What at one time had been an impossibility was now a positive pleasure. Every morning before breakfast, he and Lyon took long walks or rows together, for plenty of exercise was part of the prescription. As the body grew robust, so also the brain and mind gathered vigour, and Lyon watched the progress with secret satisfaction. But he was not without some anxiety, both on Gower's and Winter's account. He did his best, but he could not always be on the watch.

Strangely enough Gower had an intense objection to a pledge of any sort. He showed himself most anxious to refrain from one taste of the still powerful temptation; but at the same time refused perversely to help himself by any binding promise. It was this, together with an odd look which at times appeared on his face, which made Lyon anxious.

'If a man has not strength and resolution enough to do a thing without binding himself by a promise he is worthless,' urged Gower, with an air of conviction. 'I will do it without that, or not at all.'

He did not trouble himself much about Lyon's private business; he questioned him sometimes, indeed often, about his work and especially about the workings of the society; but otherwise he evinced no interest in his doings.

In his heart Lyon was glad; for it enabled him to keep to himself many things he did not care to talk about. His visits to Mr. Wycherley were a studiously avoided subject; he never even mentioned the name. Once the children, Katie and Sybil, chattered about Miss Alis; but Gower thought it was Alice, a

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common enough name, and took no notice. He took a great fancy to Sybil, which that most particular little lady reciprocated. Almost every evening about tea-time she made her appearance, and expected as her right a respectful welcome. Willie worshipped at the shrine of his little lady once more, and she received his homage graciously.

She was daily growing more bewitching, and Lyon thought with some anxiety of her future.

'What is to become of her?' he said one evening, unconsciously speaking his thoughts aloud, which was a habit acquired in his own solitude. 'She is not fit for her position.'

'Who is not?' asked Gower, looking up from his book with a keen glance.

'Sybil. What is to become of her?'

'Her father will turn up one of these days.'

'Heaven forbid!' exclaimed Lyon.

'Why?'

'It would be the worst thing that could happen to her, unless he be a very different man from what circumstances would lead us to believe.'

'What a pity you cannot lay hold of him and reform him,' replied Gower.

'He keeps a sharp look-out upon her, I believe,' said Lyon, absently. 'How he came by that envelope I cannot imagine. Did I tell you?'

He took the envelope out of his pocket-book and passed it to him. Gower took it, and listened to the account.

'Umph! it looks as if the gentleman were a near neighbour. He might have picked it up as he passed; but it is a very queer thing. You will come across him one of these days, no doubt.'

With apparent indifference he dismissed the subject, and resumed his book. When Sybil came in the next day, he lifted her in his arms and walked to the pier-glass.

'Will Sybil be my little girl?' he asked, looking with scrutinising eyes at the reflection of their faces. 'Does Sybil remember her own papa?'

The child shook her head, and laughed and nodded at herself. 'I'm Mr. Lyon's little girl now; his very own.'

'But wouldn't you rather be my little girl, and come for rides in a pretty carriage?' he asked, with unwonted tenderness in his voice. 'I should like a little girl all of my own.'

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She looked at him in silence, and then turned and looked at Lyon, evidently thinking it over in her mind.

'Well?' said Gower. 'If you will be my little girl I will buy you pretty frocks, and such cakes and bon-bons! You shall have a doll as big as a baby, and a real cradle to put it in.'

The child listened eagerly, but suddenly her eyes filled with tears. 'I am Mr. Lyon's little girl, and I can't be yours too,' she said, with a stifled sob. Still Gower went on:—

'Mr. Lyon will give you up if you ask him. Go and ask him now.'

He put her down and she ran to Lyon; then turning round from the shelter of his arms, she cried, defiantly, 'I like being Mr. Lyon's little girl best; I won't be yours, but I should like the dolly.'

Lyon laughed, but Gower's face darkened, and he walked out of the room without another word. From that time he began a systematic course of bribery. Not a day passed but he brought home something for the child. Toys, clothes, cakes, books,—everything her heart could wish. He took great pains to ingratiate himself with her tiny ladyship; would spend hours telling her tales, and playing with her, till she began to look upon him as her own property.

Lyon watched it all in silence, arriving at certain conclusions. He was glad that Gower had found something to interest him, and hoped much from the child's unconscious influence.

Autumn passed, giving place to winter's dreary days, and something of the old gloom settled on Gower and Winter, for the boy shared in a most marked degree the moods of the other. He went to school regularly with Dick, and was getting on rapidly; but Lyon noticed the sharp irritable tone of voice, and often saw his brow lower defiantly. Old habits and tastes were reasserting their power, and it was hard work to resist. He did try; Lyon could see that, and it made him very patient, though sometimes he was sorely tried. It seemed as if the boy were gradually drifting away again, into the dark ocean of sin. More than once he was forced to suspect that he had been drinking, and his heart grew sad as he saw him at such times take refuge in Gower's room, as if relying upon his protection.

He spoke to Gower about it, but found him in ignorance on the subject.

'I think you are mistaken, Lyon,' he said, troubled and surprised. 'I have given him leave to come in my room in

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the evening, but I do not think he has touched a drop of spirits since he came here. I will speak to him about it; he will not resent it from me.'

He did so, and found that Lyon was right. Conscious and miserable the boy stood before him with downcast eyes; but he was evidently hardening himself, and listened unmoved to all that was said. Gower had not Lyon's patience; after talking with no apparent effect for some time he grew angry and spoke peremptorily.

'Now, Winter, listen to me; either give me a promise to give up spirits and never touch another drop, or——' he paused a minute to give due weight to the words—'or keep out of my room altogether.' He thought this would have the desired effect, for he knew how the boy prized the right of entrance; but he was mistaken. With compressed lips and sullen brow Winter turned from him and left the room.

From that time he rapidly changed; the happy bright look left his face, and he grew quiet and listless. He was not defiant, but indifferent. Lyon spoke to him in vain; he listened but did not heed. Sybil still kept her old influence over him, and when with her he was happy. However, he heeded so far that they had no occasion to suspect him again for some time. Gower took little notice of him; a careless nod was all the greeting he vouchsafed when they met; and the boy grew harder and harder.

It was a great trouble to Lyon; neither kindness nor severity seemed to have any effect on the little stoic; he did not know what to do with him. Fortunately he was becoming interested and absorbed in his school lessons; he was head of his class, and all his boyish emulation was stirred to keep his post. It was no easy work, for there was one other who kept up with him, and that was little Dick. They were really clever boys, and study was a pleasure to both.

So things gradually sank back, till Lyon grew doubly anxious. Every night he returned home fearing what might be in store for him. Both Gower and Winter seemed peculiarly his care, and he dreaded more than he dared own the return of either to the old wretched life. He began to blame himself, and think he had not pursued the right course.

'In my vain egoism I have trusted to my own powers,' he thought, sadly. 'Perhaps I have been too harsh with the boy, and too careless with Gower. And yet, by urging the subject

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on him I might have disgusted him with it. Between two evils I chose that which I thought the lesser.'

He did not know what was going on in Gower's mind; he saw only the outward sign of inward unrest. One night he found him lying on the couch in his room, his hands clasped under his head in his usual careless fashion. In answer to a question he spoke in such a strange tone as sent a thrill of apprehension through Lyon. For the moment he felt unable to speak: a great dread fell upon him, a foreboding of coming evil. As he stood silent by the window, Gower turned his head, and for the first time seemed really aware of his presence, though he had spoken to him.

'Well?'

Lyon started. 'I came in for that book. Are you ill?'

'I have been asleep since noon.'

'Since noon! Have you been here all day?'

'No: I went out this morning, but was forced to come back.' As he spoke his roving eyes fell on a bottle upon the table. Instinctively he put out his hand and seized it, with the apparent intention of hiding it. But the action was too late. Lyon read the label, and understood it all. As if reading his thoughts Gower spoke; spoke bitterly, but with an intense depression.

'You give me up now? There is no hope for the man who deliberately flies from one slavery to another!'

So evident was the sadness in the tone that all Lyon's pity went out to him.

'No,' he answered, steadily. 'I have more faith in God and you.'

'What has God to do with me?'

'What have I to do with Willie?'

Gower was silent. Lyon waited for an answer, and after a time it came.

'From that I infer you regard the two cases as similar. You are willing to help Willie if he will accept the help, and God is willing to help me on the same conditions. Carry it a little further; Willie rejects you, and I reject God. Is that what you mean? I know it is; but you are wrong. Willie knows you; the past has taught him that he can trust you, and that you both can and will help him. What has the past taught me?'

'That it is possible to rise from any depth. Remember last winter.'

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'Ah yes; but it was not God; it was you.'

'And what am I?'

'Umph! His instrument you think.'

'Certainly. He does not work miracles now as He used to do; but accomplishes His purposes by ordinary means.'

'You hold curious views, Lyon.'

'Are they not common-sense ones?'

'To those who believe in the Bible perhaps. But supposing them to be correct—say that God accomplishes purposes by ordinary means, is it likely He would interfere between the devil and his property, for as such even you must regard me. He won't care to have his rights disputed.'

'I have no regard for his feelings,' replied Lyon, coolly. 'But as for interfering between him and his, God is always doing it. He does not allow his claim; remember that. They are at warfare. What are you going to do about this?' He pointed to the opium bottle as he spoke.

'I do not know.'

'Can you give it up?'

'Now? at once?'

'Yes.'

Gower hesitated. 'Yes,' he answered, slowly. 'I believe it is possible.'

'Then will you do it?'

There was no reply,

'It has already gained a hold upon you,' continued Lyon. 'It has given you temporary relief and rest, but I covet more for you than *that*, Gower. What will it do in the end?'

'Ruin me!'

'And knowing this, knowing the fatal power, will you not give it up once and for ever? Do not succumb to this after winning such a victory.'

'I cannot talk about it now. Wait.'

'Wait till when? It is dangerous to temporize.'

'I know it; but I must think about it.'

It was all the answer Lyon could get. He did his utmost, but with no apparent success. Gower was not himself; he was absent, and dreamy, and the words fell from his lips with an effort. With a heavy heart Lyon left him. After that he daily dreaded a return to the old habit of drinking; he could plainly see that he was losing influence and weight. Still he did not give it up, and at last a crisis came.

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Mrs. Ripon's father became very ill, and as her time was completely taken up with him, the children were left to themselves pretty much. One of the first things Sybil did was to run out one bitter cold day and catch a violent cold. When Lyon went round he found her coughing hoarsely, her cheeks flushed, and her little hands hot.

Mrs. Ripon was much concerned. 'You see, sir, I can't keep 'em in. I'm obliged to be with father so much; he won't let me stir if he can help it, and then they run out. I can't keep them in.'

'It is only a cold,' said Lyon, who had been watching the child attentively. 'I will take them both home with me till your father is better. Mother will look after them well.'

'Oh yes, Mr. Lyon; Mrs. Willett will care for them, I know. It is kind of you, sir.'

Lyon did not wait, but wrapping Sybil up in a thick shawl carried her home at once; Katie trotting along by his side.

Mrs. Willett was in her element; she nursed Sybil till her cold was well, and took care of them both all day, watching them with loving eyes.

Every morning Sybil found her way to Lyon's room, and had her own high chair at the breakfast-table. Although she had her breakfast with Katie in Mrs. Willett's room she always expected something more upstairs. Gower wanted her to sit close by him; but she refused, and invariably had her chair stationed midway between the two. There she came in for various attentions from both, and no little princess was ever more chivalrously tended. The curious thing was that she took it all as a right. She never asked Lyon or Gower to place her chair, or give her her usual piece of roll or toast. After wishing them good morning she would stand by the table waiting till one of them drew up her chair, when she would thank them with a regal air, indescribably amusing. Once they took no notice of her, just to try her, and after waiting in silence for some time she walked out of the room, her chest heaving with the sobs she was trying proudly to repress. It was some time before her insulted dignity recovered itself: but they never tried her again.

She and Willie were still friends, and both he and Dick were loyal little subjects. At her behest they made all sorts of toys, for they had some mechanical ingenuity, and Lyon had given them tools. He looked in the room one evening and saw a happy

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little party. The boys were hard at work, intent on turning and polishing, while Sybil and Katie watched them with absorbed interest, and Mrs. Willett contentedly knitted away and kept guard over them all. He shut the door quietly, and went away unobserved, glad to see that Willie's face looked bright and happy.

'Things will work round, I hope,' he thought. 'I have missed something in the boy's heart, but perhaps another can find it. I must wait.'

But there seemed so much waiting in his life; sometimes he felt weary of the constant strain, and then a longing would come over him for even one short rest. Not one day could he call his own, and the mental and physical toil was sometimes too much. He had too much to do, and too little relaxation.

Once a fortnight regularly he spent an evening with Mr. Wycherley; for he found the old man was falling into a melancholy state of mind most trying, and very rarely could be roused from his listless moods. The moment he saw Lyon, or Mr. Chester, he brightened and was himself again; and knowing this it became a duty, though a very pleasant one to Lyon, to go there as often as other claims would allow. He saw that it was a relief to Alison, and unconsciously he was falling into a habit of trying to take as much of the burden from her as possible. Papers, books, anything that he thought would interest Mr. Wycherley, he sent or took, and by these means often succeeded in taking him out of himself. He did not know, but suspected that this melancholy depression was owing to his son's continued silence. The subject was evidently a painful one, and he asked no questions; but one evening calling unexpectedly he found Alison alone, and she told him that it was so.

'Papa feels it so much because he and Guy parted in anger,' she continued, sorrowfully. 'They were both passionate, and said things I know they have repented of. I was away at the time; but I heard afterwards. If anything has happened to Guy it will kill papa.'

'I think in that case you would have heard. If he were ill he would get someone to write to you. He is not friendless you say.'

'Oh no; he often spoke of one friend, though he did not mention his name. This is one of his last letters.'

She took it out of her pocket and read part aloud.

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'"No, I am not alone: I have friends; at least, one friend who is a friend indeed. Ah, Alison, if you knew what he had done for your graceless brother you would bless him."'

'Then I am sure you need not fear yet,' replied Lyon. 'A friend in need and indeed would write for him if necessary. I have no doubt you will hear.'

He spoke hopefully, and saw her face brighten; hope is contagious. After that she frequently spoke to him of her brother, and gradually grew to treat him with less distance and reserve. Not unfrequently they met at Mr. Chester's, where his acquaintance was rapidly ripening into friendship. Mrs. Chester felt a great interest in him, and did not hesitate to show it. Never had Lyon so succumbed to any influence as he had to this gentle, delicate woman with her *spirituelle* face, and low voice, and indescribable sweetness of manner. She embodied his idea of an almost perfect womanhood, and there was something akin to reverence in the strong man's chivalrous deference and courtesy. Alison never liked him so well as during these evenings; he was more himself, more at ease and less reserved than with her, and she learned to know him better.

Meantime great success was attending the operations of the society. All over London their depôts were making great show and attracting attention. Lyon himself superintended many, and being general head was in constant request. Of course all this roused determined opposition: but opposition strengthened, and they were all the better for it. The depôts were made as attractive as possible. The windows were brilliantly lighted, and full of fascinating pictures and interesting literature. Books were laid open just in the middle of an exciting adventure, and there were always crowds of youngsters to read. Inside the shop all was even more attractive. A huge stove kept the place comfortably warm, and this alone tempted in many a purchaser. There was no rough hurrying them off as soon as they had spent their money; they were allowed to feast their eyes on the coloured pictures and illuminations which decorated the walls, and their ears with the sweet sounds of a large musical box which played on the counter. Finding that this led to frequent inconvenient crowding, the committee began to provide reading-rooms in connection with the chief shops. This proved an immense

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success. The boys found that after buying a book they might go into a large, warm room and read it with comfort, and were not slow to avail themselves of the privilege. In this part of the work they were aided by Miss Randolph, who provided funds for the furnishing of ten large rooms, and took the greatest interest in them. Once or twice Mr. Chester escorted her and Alison round in the evening to see one or two of them in full working order; she was delighted with it all, and more than ever inclined to do her utmost to further the work. It was new both to her and Alison, and they experienced somewhat of the feelings of a foreigner surveying strange shores.

'So these are the lower classes we hear so much about!' she exclaimed, looking out of her carriage, as it was blocked by a dense crowd round a tavern door.

'What fearful faces! Are we safe?'

There was alarm in her tone, and Mr. Chester told the man to turn back and go another way.

'We shall pass your boys' home, Miss Randolph. Would you like to stop and have a look in? The boys are probably all there, and you will see them to advantage.'

Alison could see the twinkle in his eye, but Miss Randolph took it in good faith, and they went in to find the boys holding carnival. The presence of strangers abashed them and there was a lull. Miss Randolph was much pleased with their general aspect, and spoke a few encouraging words to some of the bigger ones.

As they left, a little fellow who was passing stumbled against Alison, and she started back. The light from the lamp shone full on his face, and as he lifted his dark eyes she recognised him.

'It is Willie Winter! What is the matter, Willie?'

He made no reply and would have passed on, but Mr. Chester hearing the words, turned round and put his hand on his shoulder.

'Are you ill, Winter?' He knew the boy well, having frequently seen him of late.

'He must be ill!' said Alison, with ready pity, as he only stared vacantly before him, making no reply. 'We must take him home.'

At these words he muttered something, and throwing off Mr. Chester's hand, reeled away.

'He is not ill, sir; he's had a drop too much. I'll see him safe home,' said a big boy standing by.

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With an exclamation of horror Alison stood and looked after the unsteady little figure. Her first thought was for Lyon—a thought of pity for and sympathy with what she knew would be a keen disappointment. For the boy she only felt anger just then.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

HIS FIRST LOVE.

NICHOLAS, for he it was who spoke to Mr. Chester, followed Winter to his own door, and saw him in. He would have gone in with him, but the boy banged the door in his face, and he happened to know Mr. Lyon was at home.

Sybil and Katie were on their way to bed. On seeing Willie, Sybil stopped at the top of the stairs and waited for him. She was in a gracious mood.

'You may come and wish me good-night,' she said, condescendingly. 'You must come upstairs and I will give you one kiss.'

He went up, and then with childish coquetry she ran away from him and leaned against the wall.

'You must come here now.'

He went near and stooped for the promised kiss, but the child drew back with a look of dislike. 'No! I will not kiss you! What have you been drinking? it's not nice!'

His face darkened, and he drew back with lowering brow.

'Go away!' she cried, stamping her little foot imperiously. 'I don't like you now, you are naughty, and you look angry. Go away d'rectly!'

She pushed him away from her side, and then ran past him to Lyon's door. Quick as lightning the boy raised his hand and brought it down sharply on her arm. For one moment she looked at him in speechless astonishment, and then broke into a passion of sobs.

At the sound of her voice Gower sprang across the room and opened the door.

'What is the matter with my darling?' he cried, tenderly. 'What is the matter, Winter?'

'He hit me!' sobbed Sybil, with quivering lips, holding up

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her little white arm with its bright red mark. 'He hurt my arm! he is naughty.'

With a gleam of passionate anger in his eyes Gower strode into the passage and with one blow felled the boy to the ground. 'You dare to touch her again, you young rascal, and I'll——.'

He stopped suddenly, his lips white with anger. Then turning round he almost tore the child out of Lyon's arms and carried her into his own room and shut the door.

The boy was not stunned: with the help of Lyon's hand he rose, and stood before him, leaning against the wall and trembling from head to foot. Lyon saw it all in his face. Telling Katie to go downstairs he went back to his room, taking him with him. He scarcely knew what to say; arguments he had used till they seemed to have lost all power. He sat down and signed for him to take a seat; but he did not obey. He was not thoroughly intoxicated, but had had enough to make him angrily defiant and obstinately stubborn.

'So you have come to this, Willie! dear little Sybil is not safe with you. Must I send her away?'

'Better send me,' was the sullen reply.

'No; my little white lamb has a home to go to; you, my poor boy, belong to me. I cannot send you away. Where would you go?'

There was no answer.

Lyon sighed. 'You had better go to bed, Willie. I will see you in the morning.'

The boy turned and with unsteady step went out of the room. Lyon heard him shut his door with a bang. Presently Gower came in with Sybil in his arms fast asleep. Her face was flushed and tear-stained, and every now and then she sobbed quietly, as if haunted, even in sleep, by the memory of the first blow she had ever received. Pillowing her face comfortably on his shoulder, he walked gently up and down the room.

'She cried herself to sleep, poor little love!' he said, in a low tone. 'I walked up and down my room, and she soon dropped off. Where's that boy?'

'In his own room.'

'The little rascal! how dared he touch her!'

'He was scarcely responsible for what he did; he had been drinking.'

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'Ah!' Drawing in his breath, Gower stopped in his walk and stood still. 'If that is to be the little game, the sooner he goes the better! I cannot trust him in the same house with the child.'

'Where is he to go?'

'Anywhere. He must not stay here, Lyon! I tell you it cannot be.'

'It will be better for Sybil to go; the boy is friendless, and this is his home.'

'Do you mean to say that he shall stay and Sybil go! Do you place that little rascal before her?' demanded Gower, with rising wrath.

'I mean to say that I cannot turn the boy from his own home. The children can go elsewhere; I know where to send them. But I cannot turn the lad out of doors.'

'Then I must take Sybil away myself. Stay here to be contaminated by that little blackguard, she shall not! my little white dove.' He bent tenderly over the sleeping child, and with gentle hand smoothed back a tumbled curl.

'And yet,' said Lyon, steadily, 'he only did what anyone—even her own father—might do under the influence of drink.'

Gower turned white to the very lips, and his hand visibly shook.

'Is he sorry?' he asked, after a short pause.

'He is not in a state to be sorry. Wait till to-morrow.'

'To raise his hand against *her!*' continued Gower, with suppressed emotion. 'I cannot forgive it!'

'I think he will not easily forgive himself. But are you quite blameless, Gower?'

'I! what had I to do with it?'

'The boy looks up to you as his ideal, his hero; he imitates you, or did. Have you not rather cast him off of late?'

'I remonstrated with him when I saw he was going wrong, but he was so dogged and defiant I was forced to give it up. What do you mean?'

'It has struck me lately that he may be jealous. You have certainly neglected him since we came back from the North. Sybil has absorbed you, and he is of a jealous temperament. I am not sure that it is so, but I believe it is.'

Gower was silent. 'I have neglected him,' he said at last, his voice softening. 'I was angry with him, and besides, I have thought more of the child. But he is not imitating me now.'

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'No; I fancy he is growing defiant and hardening himself. If so, he will be ruined unless we can stop him. He has been a firm and faithful little follower of yours, Gower. Do not cast him off.'

'What can I do?'

'Let him see that there is a chance of winning back your regard; tell him so, and treat him kindly.'

'Umph! What am I to do with this child? Where is Mrs. Willett? She must come and take her.'

Having rung the bell he disposed of the child, and resumed his restless walk.

'So you think I am to blame?' he said. 'I have neglected the boy? Well, it is true, and I will act differently. He was a nice little fellow, and it seems a pity he should lose all he has gained. I will speak to him to-morrow, and see what I can do. Will that satisfy you?'

'You will feel better satisfied, I think.'

The next morning Gower called the boy into his room, and shut the door. What passed Lyon never knew; but he saw the result. Gower told him one thing.

'You were right, Lyon; the boy was jealous; he thought I had cast him off for Sybil, and it made him cynical and bitter. I have put it right, and he has promised faithfully to be different.'

From that time there was a change in both Gower and Winter. Lyon saw that the former was throwing off the growing lethargy of the past. He took a great interest in a book Lyon was bringing out, and offered to correct all the proofs. He had necessarily more time for such work, and liked it.

So the house resumed its former quietness, and things went on peaceably. Katie went back to her mother, but Sybil still stayed with Mrs. Willett, the pet and plaything of the whole house.

Christmas was a busy time, but also a very pleasant one to Lyon. Almost every day he met either Mrs. Chester, Miss Randolph, or Alison, who were all busily engaged in various preparations for Christmas festivities. There were trees to be decorated, presents of all sorts to be made and bought; and Miss Randolph's rooms looked like a fancy fair. In all her plans Alison was her right hand, and Lyon her adviser and consulter-in-chief. Even Mr. Wycherley was roused to in-

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terest, and watched proceedings with amusement. For some months he had been so nervous and irritable that Alison had been obliged to stay at home with him almost constantly. Only to Mrs. Chester's and Miss Randolph's would he allow her to go, though her circle of acquaintance was rapidly widening. To these two places he would himself go, but nowhere else.

Going in one evening, Lyon found a marvellous change. Alison's face was radiant with happiness, and the old man looked himself again. Something had happened! that was evident. Lyon was not long left in the dark.

'My son is coming home, Mr. Lyon,' said Mr. Wycherley, unable to conceal his satisfaction. 'He has been abroad for some years, and lately we have been anxious on his account, as his letters have ceased. However, he talks of coming home in the spring—April or May. You will be pleased to know each other, I am sure. Guy is one of your sort; is he not, my dear?'

'I hope so, papa,' replied Alison, her eyes dancing. 'I am afraid he will be much changed if it be so! I don't believe he ever heard of free libraries and costermongers' reading-rooms, and errand boys' homes and such things in his life. Mr. Lyon must teach him as he has done me.'

'I do not mean that! The child is nearly beside herself, Mr. Lyon. What I meant was that Guy was clever and argumentative. I never could argue; but he was always a good hand at it, even as a boy. He took a great interest in politics too, did he not, Alison?'

'He hated them, papa.'

'No, no! my dear. No sensible man ever hated politics. What are you thinking of, Alison? you have forgotten all about your brother, I am afraid. I am sure he will help you in any way he can, Mr. Lyon. I have no doubt he will be able to be of service to you in some of your philanthropic plans.'

This was rather too much for Alison: she laughed the low, sweet musical laugh which Lyon had learned to listen for. It was so seldom he could do more than chase the gloom from the tired face, even by his utmost efforts.

'Now, what is that for?' demanded her father, with a touch of the old irritability. 'I do not know what idea you wish Mr. Lyon to receive of your brother.'

'A very good one, papa; but not exactly the one you are giving him. Guy is a dear boy, but I do not think he cares

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much for such work as Mr. Lyon's. This will be a happy Christmas after all, Mr. Lyon.'

'Indeed, I hope it will,' he replied sincerely. And then, as he set out the chess-men he began to wonder if the coming of this brother would make any difference to him. He felt a pang as he thought that possibly his visits were nearing their close, for it might not suit this Guy to have one in his position visiting on familiar footing his home, his father, and sister. With a feeling akin to envy he watched the bright face as it bent over some trifling work. He could see the smiles that would every now and then break out like sunshine, and knew they were not for him.

For the first time there rose up within him a passionate rebellion against his toiling life. The past looked worthless and ignoble, the future joyless, and cold, and sombre. What if in years to come he did win name and fame! what if he did rise by dint of strength of will to a position and place among the honoured names of earth! What would it be to him to take *then* what might *now* bring within his reach the rich crown of a man's life? Was he to be content to live his life for others? Was he to give up all hope of sunshine and the brightness which makes life a thing to be desired? Was *home* to be always a thing of name only?

'You made a false move! you see it now?—you did not intend to give me that bishop,' said Mr. Wycherley's mild voice.

For some minutes Lyon watched the game and retrieved his false step; then his eyes went back. She had dropped her work and was sitting, as he had so often seen her sit, with folded hands and eyes fixed on the blazing fire. Her thoughts had gone. Where? He wondered if ever they wandered to him; if ever he crossed her mind when absent. And then he wondered if the bare possibility of his feeling other than mere friendly feeling for her had ever suggested itself. Suppose it had, she would reject it with wonder and scorn. And yet such things had been.

While he watched her she raised her eyes, and met his gaze. What it told her he did not know; but the quick vivid colour flashed to cheek and brow, and her eyelids fell again. What did it mean? She had met his gaze often before with frank indifference. Had he told her something of his thoughts, and would she now resent them, and with offended pride point him to his distant place?

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He lost the game; it could not be otherwise. False move after false move placed him in his enemy's power, and the check-mate was given.

'I am not in the mood to-night,' he said, sweeping the men off the board. 'I make it poor play for you, Mr. Wycherley. We must try another night.'

Mr. Wycherley acquiesced, and settling himself in his arm-chair began to talk about his son. But he had had a wearying, exciting day, and presently his head began to nod, and he fell fast asleep.

Almost with fear Lyon turned to Alison, dreading the cold condemnation of her first words and look. But the frank eyes met his with nothing of consciousness in their blue depths, and his fears were set at rest.

'She knows nothing!' was the first thought, bringing with it a feeling of relief. But in that one short hour he had passed a Rubicon, and for him there was no return.

She began to speak to him of Sybil, of whom she had seen nothing of late.

'Papa could not bear the idea of a child in the house,' she said, 'he was so nervous and irritable. I knew both she and Katie were in good hands, or it would have been a great trouble to me not to have them here while Mr. Ripon was so ill. Sybil is with you now?'

'Yes; she is sure to make friends in her way through the world. Did I tell you about Willie?'

No; he had not, and she had never mentioned to him that she had seen the boy on the night of her visit to the home. He told her all now, the fall and rise, and the cause of it all.

'In a sense it was owing to Sybil; he thought she had taken his place, and he was jealous.'

'And this Mr. Gower, it is very good of him to take so much interest in them both. Why does he do it?'

'Willie was a true little friend to him once, when he happened to need a friend, and he cannot forget it.'

'It seems a strange thing for a child like Willie to be able to befriend a gentleman, for such you say Mr. Gower is,' said Alison, wonderingly.

'Curious things happen to men in this great city of ours. Willie saved his life; he fell almost under the wheels of a cab, and the boy sprang to the horse's head and forced it back.'

'Ah, then I can understand Mr. Gower's gratitude. I hope

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he will take care of Willie, and see that he grows up well. You have heard nothing of Sybil's father, I suppose?'

It was singular she should ask the question then, when the subject was just in his mind. For a moment he hesitated, and then answered frankly.

'I may tell you, for I know it will be safe. I think I do know something of Sybil's father, who and what he is. I have no fear for her future; she will be well taken care of. We were right in supposing him to be a gentleman, but one brought by painful circumstances down into the depths. He is rapidly winning his way back, and, I believe, is only waiting to feel sure of himself to claim her.'

'How singular! It is like a romance. So little Sybil will find her place in the drawing-room after all. I am very glad! I suppose I must ask no questions?' cried Alison, pleased and surprised, and a little curious, as was natural.

Lyon laughed. 'It is too bad to tell so little! But I do not know that I am justified in speaking of it at all, as accident, or rather observation, has revealed it to me. I will tell you everything as soon as I may.'

'Doesn't he know that you know?'

'No: I really do not know! I never thought of it. He has made no sign as yet.'

'Then I shall not see much more of the dear child,' said Alison, with regret. 'I am almost tempted to be sorry, but that is very wicked of me. I wanted to adopt her myself, only papa objected.'

'Where are you dining on Christmas Day?' Mr. Wycherley asked, when Lyon rose to leave.

'At home, with all the boys. I have promised them. There is to be a grand dinner party; each boy invites a guest.'

'But that will be at one;' replied Mr. Wycherley. 'We do not dine till six; could you not come then? All those boys can do very well without you, I am sure. We shall be quite alone.'

Undecided, Lyon hesitated. He wished to accept the invitation; it was very tempting to him. But could he manage it? there was so much to be seen to on Christmas Day. To anyone else he would at once have replied that it was impossible; but even the impossible becomes possible under certain circumstances.

'We will dine later if it will suit you better,' said Alison,

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with just a faint touch of eagerness in her tone. It decided him; he had gone too far to resist that.

'But would it not inconvenience you?' he asked, more for the pleasure of hearing her reply than any feeling of polite reluctance to give trouble.

'Indeed it will not; will it, papa? We are not at all wedded to our six o'clock dinner. Will seven suit you?'

He would make it suit him; that she wished him to come was enough. For once he consulted himself, his own pleasure, and left the house in a curious frame of mind. He walked home, under the clear star-lit sky, with strange thoughts rising unbidden, but unchecked. Love was to him a sacred, untouched thing, a something to be reverenced in itself; God's best gift to His children. He had seen it in others, and had marked its oft-time effect. Home after home he had seen formed, raised, purified and gladdened by its presence. But that it could ever touch him had seemed impossible; it looked so distant from his life. Years before, he had dreamed his dreams as all must do; but years of earnest toil and hard endeavour had chased away the rainbow tints, and left him only the more sombre ones of work and duty. He had deemed himself for ever free, and this strange new consciousness filled him with troubled thoughts.

There were none of the glad wild throbbings of hope; he had no hope. And yet, in itself, the very feeling of an awakened love carried with it its own pain and pleasure.

It was curiously characteristic that he attempted no analysis, no questioning. He accepted the fact which had come to him with all the suddenness of a spiritual revelation; accepted it unquestionably, for he knew it to be true.

And now it seemed to him strange that he had not seen it before—that he had gone on so long in ignorance. Looking back on the past he could understand much at which he had wondered. The power *she* had held to wound or hurt; it was explicable enough now.

His first love! Alone in his room he sat, with folded arms and saddened eyes. He knew what it meant; that for him now had come the bitterness which only those who feel can understand. Then there rose up within him again, a wild passionate rebellion against his fate! a fierce protest against the burden of his life. Had he not been cut off from all that made life dear? Had not home, and friend, and brother been visions only? Had he not given up all that might have been

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his for the work demanded from him at his Master's hand? And now was this crowning cross to be laid upon him? Was he to stoop and lay upon his already burdened shoulders this heavier burden? Was this strange sweet love which should have been the crown of his life to be ruthlessly crushed and killed, leaving for him only a locked chamber in the sanctuary of his heart?

He was weakly human—humanly weak! With all his indomitable will, his strength of intellect and mind, his self-possession and powers of self-repression, he was vulnerable here. Few men can calmly look a dead hope in the face; few can bury without a groan a cherished dream. But his was not a hope or cherished dream; it was a sudden glimpse into a beautiful future, a sudden opening of the gates of an earthly Paradise, and then only the chill cold of the iron bars.

It was a hard battle to fight, but he fought it well. The thought came 'Why may you not win her? "She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd; she is a woman, therefore may be won."'

But at what cost? That was the question. He knew that it was not impossible for him to win such a name that even she might share it. England gives honour to her risen men; but then the rise must be no uncertain thing, no half and half measure. A man must come out of the ranks, shake off old habits and old friends, throw aside the tell-tale uniform, gather to himself the outward signs of rank, and then the magic word may be spoken; not otherwise. He knew it; knew that his hand had power to break all barriers down. His name already was winning its meed of fame. The book which he was then giving to the world would strike in such a fight a powerful blow. If he would, he might come out from among the people and make his home in higher ranks. The choice lay in his own hands. He had known it before, but had not been tempted; his life-work and aim were too dear. But now the one thing that could shake his resolution had come, and he trembled before it.

Leave it all! the people to whom he was dear, and who were dear to him? the work which had absorbed his eager, youthful energies, his manhood's deeper interest? Say farewell to the dark haunts of sin to which he had carried the pure light of a grand Christianity, the homes of woe and want and misery, the bedside of the sufferer, the city's myriad needs!

But must he leave them all? Could not the two be com-

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bined,—the work for others, and the work for self? For one brief moment he gave it thought, then cast it away. No; it was not possible. Men with position assured might stoop and work; not so the struggler upward. To rise, demands a man's whole manhood's energies, and he who hesitates is lost.

Stern truths! stern because of their truth. The battle was sharp but short. Duty pointed him still with never-drooping finger to the work he had voluntarily taken up as his. To leave it all and enter the pleasant seductive paths which were assuming now alluring aspects was not for him. If by this means only she was to be won, then she was not to be won by him. Happiness at the cost of duty, love at the cost of honour, were not to be his self-chosen lot.

All through the silent night he fought with the strong temptations of dreams and visions of the beautiful possible future. He wrestled with his ever-ready foe of doubt and dark distrust. As often of old his spirit failed him, and nothing but gloom and darkness gathered round. He had no ever-hopeful, buoyant temperament, carrying with it sunshine even into shadow. He knew too well what it meant to be folded in mists and doubts, his faith and courage failing. But he carried by his side the strong man's weapon. God was to him no dreamy fiction, no sentimental vision; He was a veritable friend and counsellor, a guide and brother. Claiming to the very utmost the fulfilment of the promised help he conquered. The cold gray dawn found him still with head bowed upon his folded arms.

But the clocks roused him at last and he rose, faint with the strife, but strong in victory. It was over, and he had won.

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CHAPTER XL.

FATHER AND CHILD.

'WHERE are you on Christmas Day, Lyon?'

'Here till about six; then I have an engagement,' replied Lyon, who had resolved to leave Mr. Wycherley's early.

'What a nuisance!' exclaimed Gower, impatiently. 'Can't you get out of it? it's some confounded charity tea, I suppose?'

'I cannot get out of it, but I will come back as early as possible. Will you be here?'

'Where else in the world should I go? So I must be content with solitude. I'll give the boys a lesson in sparring to let off a little of the *ennui*. It is wicked to work on Christmas Day, isn't it?'

'Very.'

'What a pity! I might correct that heap of proofs for you. What a predicament for a fellow to be in! mustn't work, and no one to play with! I cannot play by myself!'

'Poor boy! and on Christendom's holiday too. Never mind; I will be here without fail at half-past nine,' said Lyon, laughing. He was rather glad to bind himself by a promise, distrusting as he did his own strength.

Christmas Day was a very busy one. The boys next door were riotous, and Dick and Willie shared the general hilarity. The grand dinner at the Home was at one, and Lyon presided. Gower looked in, but rushed off in dismay at the noise. However, even he was coaxed in afterwards by his little favourite Sybil, who begged him to take her to see the games. There was a meeting of costermongers and their wives at half-past five: a tea-meeting got up by Lyon and old Steady, for such as had no means of spending a comfortable Christmas at home.

After seeing his boys seated at tea Lyon rushed off and presided at the opening of the other meeting, and then went on to Mr Wycherley's.

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He thought he had prepared himself; he thought that he was hardened, and could meet her without a sign; but when Alison came forward to meet him and laid her hand in his, and looked up into his eyes with a sweet, half-shy look of welcome, he felt the treacherous colour flush his face, and his heart gave one wild throb. It was new to him to see her take the place of hostess, and he watched her every movement with something more than interest. There was a subtle charm in her quiet, graceful ease, a fascination in the low, soft voice, which he could not resist. The silvery, almost white evening dress, with its rich laces and blue ribbons, the little winter rose in her hair, the jewels gleaming on her arms and neck, seemed to be part of her, so well did they accord with the pure refined face.

But she was altered; he could detect a change in her tone and manner, and it troubled him. There was a reserve, an indescribable drawing back, even when voluntarily addressing him. Lovers' eyes and ears are quick to mark the slightest difference, and then restless till the cause be found. It did not take him long to discover it; she was but showing her disapproval of his presumption; that one look of his had told her enough at least to rouse her pride. And believing this his manner grew more and more cold and formal. Alison saw it and wondered; that it was occasioned by her own conduct she had not the slightest idea. At first she thought he had some business pressing upon him, making him distrait and absent; but finding that his manner to her father remained unchanged, and to her only was he distant and cold, she gradually concluded that in some way she had offended him. But this puzzled her more than ever; she grew silent and thoughtful, recalling every incident of their last meeting. And of course, with the usual perversity of human nature, Lyon mistook her silence. He left at nine, much to Mr. Wycherley's regret. Alison said nothing; to her mind the 'promised evening with a friend' was simply a polite excuse.

'I don't think Mr. Lyon was himself to-night,' said her father, after his guest's departure. 'He did not look well. He is over-working himself.'

'No, he was not himself,' replied Alison, absently. 'I suppose it is rather dull for him here. I wonder he came.'

Mr. Wycherley opened his eyes in mild astonishment. 'Dull? why I was talking to him all the time. I did not neglect him,

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my dear. You may depend upon it he is over-working himself. We shall hear of his being laid up next.'

'I hope not! there is no one to nurse him.'

'Plenty of good nurses to be had for money, and he must be making money now. I should not wonder if he died a rich man.'

'He will never be rich, papa. He spends too much. I cannot fancy him a rich man! he would not be John Lyon.'

Mr. Wycherley took up a paper, and Alison was left to her own musings. She felt disturbed and troubled; the friendship with John Lyon she had learned to prize, and her heart misgave her as she thought that it had received its first blow. But what had done it? Involuntarily she coloured as she recalled the earnest gaze of the grave eyes that last evening. It had struck her then that perhaps he regarded her with more than a passing interest, but now she was shown her mistake. She could not hide from herself the fact that the thought had given her pleasure; not that she had dreamed of ever being more to him than she already was, but with her keen appreciation of the strength and nobility of his character she could not but feel that the gift of his love would be even to her high honour. But with some humiliation she acknowledged herself mistaken; he had scarcely paid her common attention. And yet he had not failed in courtesy—she could not accuse him of that; although he had rarely addressed her he had attended to all her wants with a readiness which showed that he was observant as ever.

She found out now what she had not suspected—simply because she had never given it thought—that the loss of his respect and friendship would leave a vacuum in her life. With pain she tried to imagine a cause for his altered manner, for she knew him too well, honoured him too much, to attribute it to any light caprice. For whatever he did he had just cause.

But she did not touch the truth; proud as she was in some respects, holding fast the prejudices of caste, she was conscious of the innate, personal nobility which gave him unquestionable superiority over men of mere worldly wealth and culture: that he could be troubled by any sense of inferiority even to herself never once occurred to her. He had forced her respect and it could not be recalled.

Punctually at half-past nine Lyon entered his home. The boys next door were still holding carnival, but he did not feel inclined to go in. He found Gower and Winter together.

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'You did tear yourself away then!' said the former, with mock surprise. 'I wonder you have come home whole! Robin, go and see what damages there are.'

Lyon answered lightly, but with an undercurrent of pain; there had been apparently no reluctance to allow his departure. At a signal from Gower, Winter rose to go. He looked unusually bright and handsome, his face flushed with excitement.

'Now, remember!' said Gower warningly. 'It is a bargain, Robin.'

'Yes, sir. I'll never forget.'

'What is it?' asked Lyon, seeing the boy look wistfully at him, as if he had something to tell. 'No secrets, Willie.'

'It isn't a secret from you, Mr. Lyon! Mr. Gower said I was to tell you. He has promised to look after me and get me on in the world if I'm good and steady,'

'Go on; that is not all,' said Gower, as the boy paused.

He coloured deeply, and went on in a lowered tone. 'He's made me promise never to take a drop of drink again without asking him or you, and I never will. I've promised sure and certain, and I never broke a promise.'

There was a very apparent exultation and pride in the last words, which made Lyon smile. 'That is a very good Christmas promise, Willie. Keep it, my boy, and you will bless the day you made it. Have you had a pleasant day?'

'Oh, jolly!' was the enthusiastic reply. 'The tree was splendid, and I got just what I wanted. But this has been the jolliest part—being up here with Mr. Gower. Good-night, sir.'

He went off, and they heard him whistle merrily as he slid down the balustrade. Lyon drew his chair to the fire and sat down.

'Come, this is an improvement,' said Gower, with satisfaction. 'Solitude does not agree with my constitution. Hand over the poker, old boy, and let us rouse the shadows. Now, to do the thing properly, we ought to have a bowl of punch and drink to the health of old friends.'

'And new ones.'

'It would not take me long to sum up the number of both,' replied Gower, with a touch of sadness in his tone. Lapsing into one of his silent moods he sat gazing into the blazing fire, with the old, well-known expression of melancholy stealing over his face.

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'Pleasant, genial company!' he suddenly exclaimed, breaking the silence. 'Why did you not stay away altogether?'

'Pleasant company, truly,' replied Lyon, with good-humoured irony. 'It is well that I am used to you and your polite ways. I am waiting for you to condescend to talk.'

'At your service, *mon ami*. On what subject shall I endeavour to enlighten you? By the way, Lyon, seriously speaking, what do you think of me—what is your candid opinion?'

'Physically? I can scarcely judge what you would be without the dye.'

If a shell had suddenly exploded in the fireplace Gower could not have been more astonished. He stared at Lyon in speechless, comical amazement, but with evident confusion.

'Lyon, what have you been taking?'

'My dear fellow, I beg your pardon,' said Lyon, unable to retain his gravity. 'You do not suppose I could nurse you through that illness last winter without finding out the truth.'

'And you have been laughing in your sleeve at my fancied security! Open confession is good for the soul, so I'll 'fess. I do dye, and the worst of it is the confounded stuff won't come off! What shall I do?' said Gower, ruefully, pushing his fingers through the thick waves of dark hair.

'You must apply to a chemist, I suppose. I do not understand the action of chemicals. What did you put it on for?'

'To disguise myself, of course. You can easily understand why I did not wish to be recognised. I wonder if I had met *them* if *they* would have known me.'

'It is a very partial disguise.'

'I know it; but I am altered in other ways too. That fellow in Scotland did not recognise me; but then he was never more than an acquaintance. I would not trust myself with some.'

'No, your face is not easily disguised. When do you think of leaving all this?'

'That is a point I want to settle. I can't make up my mind, Lyon,' replied Gower with some hesitation. 'You see they do not know anything of all this. I will tell you how it stands, and then you can judge that it is rather a difficult matter to decide. Years ago, when I was young, my father wanted me to engage myself to the daughter of an old friend of his, and I objected. I liked her very well, indeed I did more at one time, and perhaps if things had been allowed to take their natural course he might have had his wish. But, as it was, I rebelled

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and set myself resolutely against it. Poor child! I believe she did care for me too. Just while I was in a most defiant state of mind, owing to a letter from my father urging his wishes, I met—well, I cannot even now trust myself to speak of her. She was the only child of a poor Italian actor, and was innocence and loveliness itself. All that my imagination had ever pictured she realized, and you may guess the consequence. I wrote home and prepared my father for what I knew would be a shock to his aristocratic proclivities, and he sent back an answer which roused all my hot blood. I went to see him, and in the interview we both lost our temper. He utterly refused his consent to our marriage—I utterly refused to give her up. We parted in anger, and I did not go home for a year. During that year I gradually sank: the habit of drinking grew upon me till I lost nearly all self-control, and then——but I won't expatiate on what must be a familiar phase to you. Then came the final visit home, and a long stormy interview. I made the most of his opposition simply because I wanted an excuse for a quarrel. Strange, wasn't it? Ah well, we are all fools sometimes.'

He paused, gazing dreamily into the fire. His words called up so vividly the wild follies of his younger days that he lost the thread of his narrative. Lyon waited silently.

'We were only married one year and then she died,' he continued, quietly. 'That was the final severing blow; after it I cared for nothing and no one, and went down as fast as the devil chose to lead me. I think I had reached a crisis when I met you.—Did you wonder why you never heard from me after that fire?'

The abrupt change of subject was like the man. Lyon looked up.

'No: I did not wonder.'

'Why not?'

'I put it down to the right cause. I knew you.'

'I was ashamed to come, and that's the truth,' was the frank reply. 'Just look at the circumstances; I had insulted you, cast off your friendship, acted exactly counter to your advice, and then you must needs save my life! You could not have done a more aggravating thing. Why, you were the last in the world from whom I would have wished to receive such a gift as my own life. Nothing is more irritating than being forced into an obligation to one whom you have slighted or

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injured. I abused you up hill and down dale, and felt ashamed of myself all the time. I wonder what else you have discovered besides the dye.'

He bent forward with a sudden flush, and a confused, half-laughing look of inquiry. Their eyes met, and Lyon's lips relaxed.

'I have had my suspicions,' he answered, frankly. 'Your attentions to a certain little lady were too marked to pass unnoticed.'

'Bless her! yes, Sybil is my own child. I kept the secret up to a certain date, and then didn't care. I felt that you knew, but I would not say anything about it for a time. I wanted to be sure of myself first. You understand.'

'Yes. But what made you send her to Mrs. Ripon's in the first place? It was a queer thing to do.'

'Not when you consider that I was lodging in the same house; that I had noticed her happy little girl, and had seen what a good mother she was. I did not care for Sybil, then: I had not one spark of affection for her. Her mother's death had absorbed all my feeling, and I believe at one time I actually disliked the very sight of the child. But I felt it my duty to see that she was taken care of after a fashion. I did not, even at my worst, intend to leave her there; remember that. I always had a sort of indefinite idea of placing her some day in her proper position; I did not know *how*. Willie knows who she is. Ah, you may well look up. The fact is the poor little fellow was so jealous of her that I took compassion on him, and told the truth under promise of secrecy. He used to be my *aide-de-camp*, and more than once took the money to Mrs. Ripon, but that was long ago, before he knew the truth.'

'I wonder he did not suspect it; why should you send money to Mrs. Ripon?'

'Oh, as for that, I told him I owed her a debt of gratitude for nursing me in my illness. He never associated it with Sybil.'

'How came you to be so careless as to use one of my envelopes a little while ago?' asked Lyon.

'It was an idiotic proceeding! That roused your suspicions, I suppose. I can't think how I came to do it.'

'No, not that. It was your treatment of Sybil; especially when you punished poor little Winter so severely. What do you intend to do with her?'

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'Sybil? Lyon, I don't know what to do. I have been fighting a battle this evening. Ought I to go home?'

'Yes.'

Scarcely expecting so ready an answer, Gower looked hastily up. 'Why?'

'This is not the proper place for your daughter. At her age she ought to be surrounded by refining influences. What is her present companionship doing for her? Willie and Dick are good enough little fellows, and will do her no moral harm; but they are not proper playfellows for her, and cannot—simply cannot—give her what she ought to have. She is now at an intelligent, comprehending age, and you have a responsibility resting on you.'

'You old preacher!' said Gower lightly; but there was a roused look in his eyes which told that the words had gone home.

The next day there was an amusing scene with the child. Gower took her on his knee and asked how she would like to have him for a father. She looked up doubtfully, and after some consideration replied candidly that she did not think she should like it very much.

'Why not?' he asked, evidently disappointed.

'I am 'fraid you would take me away.'

She needed many assurances that she should not be separated from Lyon, and that she should often see Willie and Katie, before she would give her consent to the arrangement. But it was finally settled, with mutual satisfaction.

Mrs. Ripon received the news with unfeigned astonishment; the idea had never entered her head. But she was pleased, for it took a weight off her mind.

Having once thrown off all disguise Gower took the greatest pleasure in his little daughter. Not a day passed without his bringing home some childish treasure, and he insisted upon Mrs. Ripon providing whole sets of beautiful little garments. She would not have known what to do to please his fastidious taste if it had not been for Miss Wycherley, whom, in her perplexity, she secretly consulted. It was long since the child had been to Ellerslie House, and on hearing that her father had claimed her, Alison gave up all thought of seeing her again. It was a disappointment, for she had learned to love her, and had begun to think seriously of undertaking the responsibility of her education. Now it was taken out of her hands.

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She was anxious to hear something of the man upon whom so much depended, and waited impatiently for Lyon. But weeks passed, and he did not come. She could not understand it; her natural humility, of which, notwithstanding her pride, she had abundant share, precluded all possibility *now* of ascribing his absence to its legitimate cause. The thought had presented itself only to be banished with a certain sharpness of mortification. She had been mistaken; that was all.

He came at last, and she saw in his face a perceptible change. Perceptible to her, that is, not to others. She met him with quiet composure, but inward pain. His very manner seemed to speak of absorption in things in which she had no share. Instead of looking upon her as a willing if not an able coadjutor, even in a small degree, as it had been her wish he should, he shut her out completely, and was, in his reticence and reserve, as far from sympathy with her, or rather from all consciousness of her sympathy with him as ever he had been. It was hard for her, when she had struggled through so much of mental *inertia*, and had succeeded in arousing her own recognition of the nobility of service, to be thus ignored by the very hand which had given her her first upward impetus.

Little dreaming the thoughts which were occupying her mind, Lyon drew his own deductions from the grave, proud face, and bound the fetters of his own determination faster than before. Mr. Randolph, between whom and himself was an undefinable antagonism, was present, and he thought he detected in his manner to Alison a shade of half-exultant ownership. There certainly was a difference. Alison, herself, noticed it with annoyance, and treated him with unusual coldness. Altogether it was not a pleasant evening.

With an unwonted sense of depression and weariness, Lyon went home. To his surprise, he heard Gower's voice in the little room where Sybil slept, and opening the door he looked in.

'If it be only a cold,' Gower was saying doubtfully. Mrs. Willett was standing by the bedside, with a smile on her face.

'Dear me, Mr. Gower! if everybody made as much fuss when a child was a bit restless and feverish, a nice time they'd have. Now, Mr. John, what do you say?'

Lyon advanced and looked at the child. She was awake, her face flushed, and her hands hot.

'She complains of her throat,' said Gower, shortly. 'Cold or not, I shall fetch Tremaine.'

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'You will feel more satisfied if you do; go, and I will stay with her,' replied Lyon. He was not alarmed; but he could understand Gower's anxiety; the child certainly was not well.

'She has not been well all day, nor yesterday, but there was nothing much the matter with her. I've kept her indoors, and nursed her up well, so she has not caught any extra cold,' said Mrs. Willett, her manner growing a trifle more anxious. 'I made light of it to her father, because I could see how terribly he'd take it to heart. I shall be glad for the doctor to see her.'

In a very few minutes Gower returned with Mr. Tremaine. Sybil turned away from the strange face peevishly, but did not speak. He asked a few questions, and took the tiny hand in his.

'Well?' said Gower, his face white with the tension.

'I can scarcely tell yet; I will call again in the morning. Have there been any cases of scarlatina in the neighbourhood?'

At the word scarlatina Gower gave a sudden start, and then his face grew rigid. He turned inquiringly to Mrs. Willett, but she shook her head.

'I have heard of none, sir.'

Leaving all necessary directions, Mr. Tremaine went out. After a little while the child sank into a restless sleep, and Lyon went to his own room. Presently Gower followed and sat down.

'I suppose she will die,' he said, with forced calmness.

Lyon looked at him, and was struck by a change in his appearance. At first he could not make it out, but at last saw that his hair and moustache were many shades lighter. Meeting his gaze, Gower ran his fingers through the thick waves with a half smile.

'Ah, you see what I have been doing. I have been making up my mind to take *her* home, and this was the first necessary step. She will never go home.'

'Do not look at the dark side; many recover, and she has a good constitution.'

But attempts at comfort were useless. In one of his old melancholy moods Gower silently went off to his own room, where Lyon heard him for hours afterwards pacing the floor, but going every half-hour to look at the child. Lyon himself was too anxious to sleep. There was a heavy responsibility resting on him. Not only for Sybil herself had he to think, but for the boys, both those with him and in the Home next door.

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And somehow he did not feel equal to the effort and trouble of thinking and arranging. His brain was wearied out, and his head ached and throbbed. The thought crossed him that perhaps he too was going to be ill; but he dismissed it, almost in anger. He could not afford the time to be ill.

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CHAPTER XLI.

LIFTED FROM THE DEPTHS.

THEN followed a time of great anxiety and care. Sybil grew worse and worse, and Mr. Tremaine made no attempt to conceal the truth; there was danger of a fatal termination. The fever, for such it had proved to be, seemed an irresistible power, and won its way despite all the opposition of science.

Night and day Gower watched by the bedside of the unconscious child; eagerly noting each trifling change. Never had he so loved the beautiful little face as now, when it was flushed with the brilliancy of fever: never had he listened so eagerly for the childish voice as now, that it was hoarse and changed. To lose his darling was to lose his all.

Lyon had sent the two boys away, much to their grief; they could not bear to be banished. Day after day Willie waited and watched outside the house, waylaying every one who came out. The last thing at night his wistful eyes looked the question which his lips dared not speak. His love for the child was deep and passionate, such as his nature was capable of feeling, and to it was added remorse for the one blow which his hand had dealt. He could not forget it, could not forgive it.

Taking pity on his evident misery and wretchedness Lyon turned back one night, and taking his hand walked with him to the door of his whilom home. He spoke of their probable loss, and felt the boy's hand quiver with suppressed emotion. Turning to the brighter side he spoke of the child's gain, of her beautiful home, and freedom from pain and care. Willie listened, the clasp of his hand growing firmer. At the door they paused, and he looked up with determination in the depths of his dark eyes.

'Mr. Lyon, I want you to hear me make a promise.'

'Not a rash one, Willie.'

'No, sir, a deliberate and right one.'

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He stood under the lamp, with its light shining full on his upturned face. Evidently he had purposely chosen the position, for his resolute, fearless eyes looked up with a challenge of scrutiny.

'Mr. Lyon, I solemnly promise never to touch one drop of intoxicating drink again! never as long as I live! And I promise God and you, and Mr. Gower, and—and Sybil, that I will take up as part of my life work, the putting down of strong drink! I struck *her* once, but it was the devil in me that made me do it, because I thought she and Mr. Gower didn't care one bit for me; he never took any notice of me then. I know the reason now. Of course he would love his own little girl; but I didn't know it then, and it made me mad! Mr. Lyon, I might have killed her.'

There was a thrill of horror in his voice, and his lips were white, as he spoke the words.

'I believe I hated her, though I loved her all the time! And I hated Mr. Gower and you, but not so much as I hated myself. I've wanted to tell you; you were so good to me. When I saw how my badness troubled you I wanted to run away and never see you again. Mr. Gower told me how anxious you were, and how sorry that I was going back. He told me I ought to be ashamed of myself, and so I was. Do believe it, sir!'

He looked up with wistful, entreating eyes, and Lyon clasped his hand firmly.

'I do believe it, my boy. I knew there was a struggle going on, and only God could do the work. It would have been a great grief to me if I had lost you again.'

'I knew it, sir, and I *could not* go away; something kept me there.'

'What was the something, Willie?'

There was a quick answering glance, but no words.

'When I was your age,' continued Lyon, musingly, walking slowly on, 'I wanted just what I have tried to give you. It was no easy thing to take the right road with no guiding hand on the reins. Look at that horse.'

He stopped as a horse and cart in front of them turned a corner and disappeared.

'Why did the horse take that turn?'

'It was Rode's horse; he was driving. I suppose he wished to go that way.'

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'Exactly; that horse has a certain destination before him, but without the hand on the rein he would scarcely get there. Many a time I did not know which road to take, and would have given much for a hand on the rein. Do you understand?'

Following the train of thought the boy replied by asking another question. 'What made you take the right turn then?'

'I possessed reasoning faculty beyond that of the horse, and I could read. I had a written guide which helped me to a certain extent: but there were times when I could not find in it all I wanted, and others when I forgot to look at it. The hand on the rein was my one great need.'

'Mr. Lyon, don't take your hand off the rein! off my rein,' said Willie, with sudden entreaty. 'I understand it all. I do want to make something of my life.'

They were words Lyon had heard Gower speak, and he understood how the boy came to use them.

'Your life is in your own hands. I can guide, if you will let me; I cannot force you.'

There was a curious gleam in the boy's eyes, as if he recognised in the sentence an undercurrent of meaning. No; it would be no easy matter to force him, and in some moods he would have gloried in the admission. Now, his eyelids drooped; he felt it a humiliation rather than otherwise, seeing himself in the mirror of an awakened self-distrust.

'Now, I must go,' said Lyon kindly. 'Run in and go to bed as quickly as possible. Determine to shape your own future on a good pattern.'

'You?'

Lyon smiled. 'No; a better than I.'

He went back, and found Sybil worse. Gower sat by the bed, watching this one little unit which represented to him so much of all that our humanity holds dearest. One thought was uppermost—'If I had taken her away before this would never have happened,' and the burden of self-reproach was more than he could bear. In the intervals of consciousness the blue eyes, so like his own, had looked up full of a strange new light. At times he had almost believed that the mother's soul looked at him through the child's clear eyes, so deep and earnest and questioning.

It was a bitter time for him. Gradually and unconsciously all the sacredness of his love for his dead wife had shadowed

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her child, till the careless, half-instinctive affection which Sybil had at first inspired had deepened into a reverential tenderness. For her own sake she was dear; for her mother's sake she was sacred.

'How has she been?' asked Lyon, standing at the foot of the bed. But he needed no answer.

'Tremaine said he would come back in an hour,' whispered Gower, without turning his head. 'What right has he to play with life like this! Go and fetch him, Lyon.'

But there was no occasion for him to go; the doctor's step was heard on the stairs. He came in, and stood still, with grave impenetrable face. To Gower the silence was ominous, and his lips refused to put the question, which he wished, yet feared to ask.

But the crisis was at hand, and a few hours at most would determine the issue. Unable to sit still in his restless mood Lyon went downstairs and looked out into the night. It was cold and dark, and the chill wind made him shiver. As he turned to go in again a dark figure crouching by the wall caught his attention.

'Who is that?' he asked.

'Mr. Lyon, is she dead?'

It was Willie's voice, trembling with fear.

'No, my boy. She may recover yet; the crisis is very near, and there is hope still. What are you doing here?'

'I could not stay in bed! I *felt* that she was worse. Oh, Mr. Lyon! do let me see her! Just for one minute. If she dies I shall never be happy again.'

Lyon was troubled; the boy's agitation and grief were so real and deep that he could not bear to refuse him; but he thought it right nevertheless.

Willie listened in silence to the kindly sympathetic words, but shivered with suppressed emotion; then turned and was lost in the darkness. Lyon went back with a heavy heart. Sitting down opposite Gower, he leaned his head wearily on his hands. The child was very dear to him, and he shrank from giving her up. There were few in the world who had won access to his heart; but she was one of the few. He felt for Gower too, and little Winter, whose grief had touched him deeply; there was such *abandon* in it.

Gower's voice disturbed the silence.

'What is it, my precious one?'

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He looked up hastily, and saw that the child's eyes were open. At her father's words she smiled, but did not speak. He bent over her, touching the white forehead with tender lips.

'Does my darling know her father?'

'Yes,' replied the childish voice, low but clear. '*Dear* father.'

The old caressing emphasis on the *dear* was too much for Gower. He hastily dropped his head on the pillow. The beautiful serious eyes wandered round the room, and then returned to Lyon with evident disappointment. Whom did she want? Was it Katie, her little playfellow, or Mrs. Ripon? some familiar face was evidently absent and wanted. While he wondered Lyon was startled by a sobbing whisper from the shadow of the screen.

'Mr. Lyon, may I speak to her? only this once?'

It was Willie's voice, and the child heard it, for she looked eagerly in the direction from which it came. The next moment he was kneeling by her side.

'You know Willie, don't you, darling?' he murmured. 'Willie, who loves you so much.'

She tried to speak, but could not. A look of distress came into her face, and she looked appealingly at Lyon. He could not help her, but tried to interpret her wish.

'Do you want to say something to Willie, Sybil? Do you want to tell him something?'

Yes: that was it. Again she tried, and this time the words came! babyish, simple words, but going home.

'Don't be naughty, Willie! don't be naughty.'

They never knew what she was thinking of: ever since that evening when she had felt the force of his hand her limited vocabulary had found but one word to express his condition after drinking. She knew nothing of the ordinary terms; all she knew was that he had taken something which made him 'naughty.'

It cut the boy to the very heart. Twice in his young life he had done that which made his face flush with shame to recall: he had bitten his truest friend, and had struck the innocent little child who had loved and trusted him. It all flashed across him, with its impelling cause; the cursed drink! The slender, brown fingers clenched passionately, and hot tears of remorse slowly gathered and fell.

'Hush! your blame was small! her own father did worse,' said Gower, with the sternness of an uncompromising self-

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condemnation. He bent over the child with tender, loving words, but she did not hear. The long lashes slowly fell on the blue veined cheeks, and her breath came, soft and natural. The crisis had passed, and she was saved.

The doctor came in again, and looked on with satisfaction. 'She will do now,' he said, with more of pleasure in his tone than he generally allowed himself to betray.

Lyon looked round for Willie, but he had stolen away. He found him outside in the passage, and took him into his own room. He felt that this was a crisis in the boy's history. And he was right. But he said nothing then, for they were both wearied out. It was already morning, and there was little time for rest. When he went to his day's work it was with the feeling of leaving half himself behind. The better part of himself too; his clearness of thought, and mental vigour. On reaching home in the evening he found Sybil on a fair road to rapid recovery; that is to say she needed only careful nursing, which she was sure to have. Gower could afford to take rest now, and was doing so. Lyon found him fast asleep, and for the first time noticed the strong likeness between him and the child. As he stood by him Willie quietly stole to his side, and slipped his hand in his. It seemed a mute appeal for sympathy, and he read it aright. In the flickering firelight they had a conversation which revealed more than he had ever surmised of the boy's character. There were depths of earnestness, heights of resolution and determination such as he had never suspected. From that evening there was a bond between them which was never broken. The promise so sacredly made was as sacredly kept, and no drop of intoxicating drink ever passed the boy's lips again. He himself told Gower of this promise, as he preferred to call it, evidently disliking the word pledge; but it was received with silence. The fact was, Gower felt a pang of shame and regret that he had not, by precept and necessary example, induced him to accept before what he held to be so great a safeguard and help; he knew that he alone had hitherto been the cause of his reluctance to take the final step.

With Sybil's recovery a change came over Gower. He threw off entirely all lingering remnant of melancholy and self-distrust. The past seemed to fade away, and he lived in the present and future. That this was not really the case Lyon knew; but by no word or deed would he recall any painful memory. With Gower he believed in letting the dead past bury its dead, and

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had no ghoul-like propensities for digging up dead sorrow or shame. He delighted in the buoyant life which brought into his home a needed sunshine; and he dared not look forward to the separation which he knew was not far distant.

'I shall go back and take the child with me as a peace-offering,' Gower said lightly, one day. 'I wonder what your grandfather will say to you, Sybil.'

He made no special mention of his home or relatives, and beyond the fact that his mother was dead, Lyon knew nothing. As soon as Sybil was well enough to be moved he took her to a cottage in the country, within easy distance of London. Here, with fresh air, and plenty of amusement, she rapidly gained strength. Her father went down every evening; coming up in the morning.

All this Alison Wycherley heard with great interest, when Lyon, after a long absence, called. She had not even heard the child was ill, for all communication between her and Abbey-court had been suspended, owing to the prevalence of fever there, and Lyon's visits had ceased.

For this latter she could assign no cause; but it troubled her more than she cared to confess. When he did call she was alone, and after a brief and somewhat constrained conversation he rose to leave.

'I shall certainly go and see Sybil,' she said, also rising. 'That is, if you think her father will not object. Papa and I take such long drives now that we shall have plenty of opportunities. You say it is within easy driving distance from here?'

'Yes, and the country is very pleasant. I am sorry I have not seen Mr. Wycherley. Will you tell him that the articles he wished to see appeared last April and May?'

'Will you not come and see him another evening?' she answered, impelled by a sudden impulse to speak. 'It is so long since you were here, Mr. Lyon. I thought you were never coming again.'

He looked down and wondered to see the quick flush rise to the pale cheek. What could it possibly matter to her whether he came or not?

'It is scarcely fair to desert us—especially while I am still unused to the work you have given me,' she continued, trying to speak lightly.

'I have given you?' he repeated, in surprise. 'What have I given you?'

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She was silent. If he were really ignorant of his own influence it might be as well not to enlighten him, was her first hurt and indignant thought. But she changed her mind as she looked up and met his wondering gaze.

'I mean that work which you first introduced to me. I knew nothing about the London poor till you roused my interest, Mr. Lyon.'

'Ah, but the inclination, the wish to work was there. I but showed ways and means,' he answered, as if anxious to disclaim any share in the matter. 'You must not credit me with more than I deserve, Miss Wycherley.'

'I do not. I spoke the simple truth,' she answered, quietly. He saw that she was hurt, but for once his penetration failed him; perhaps because the subject was one affecting himself.

After he had gone she resumed her seat, indignant with him, angry with herself, and ashamed of both feelings. But the sting lay in the thought that he did not consider her friendship worth having. While she had been learning to know and respect him—while he had been rising in her estimation, she had been sinking in his. This was how she looked at it, and it touched more than her pride.

She banished all trace of feeling from her face before her father came in, and told him of the visit. He was sorry he had missed Lyon, but did not trouble much about it; it was of little consequence to him. He willingly agreed to drive round by the cottage where Sybil was staying, on hearing that there was no possible fear of contagion.

'I should like to see her father; he is some poor broken-down wretch, no doubt,' he said placidly. 'Perhaps I can help him to employment. I will speak to him about it, and can then form my own opinion of his capabilities, and ask Randolph or Chester to interest themselves in the matter.'

'Indeed, papa, I hope you will do no such thing!' said Alison, dismayed. 'I do not want to see him even, and there is little chance of our doing so. He is in town all day. I should not go if he were there.'

Mr. Wycherley, thus opposed in his mild benevolence, looked astonished, but made no remark. If Alison did not wish him to benefit her little *protégée's* father it really did not matter to him. There was very little of the active spirit of philanthropy in Mr. Wycherley.

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'I am disappointed in Mr. Lyon,' he observed, after a while.

Alison looked up. 'Why, papa?'

'He does not come up to the mark. I expected better things of him. Why doesn't he come out more?'

'Out where?' asked his daughter, perversely refusing to understand.

'In the world. But of course he would if he could. I have expected too much from him. He hasn't it in him to make a name, or of course he would do it. His pamphlet was spoken very highly of too.'

'I don't think it is power that is wanting; it is will. He is so absorbed in other work.'

'Not he; no man was ever yet so disinterested! Depend upon it, Chester will find out he has been mistaken. Brain power is not so easily found, especially among the lower classes. Lyon will collapse, and find his level.'

The words grated on Alison's ear, and roused her indignant protest.

'I am sure you wrong Mr. Lyon, papa. Give every man his due. I believe he is really and truly disinterested, and self-sacrificing. He is giving up his own advancement solely for the purpose of helping those wretched people. I honour him.'

'Well, well, perhaps it is so. Anyhow, he is not coming to the fore, so my disappointment remains the same,' replied her father, with irritating composure. 'In this case the cause does not affect the issue.'

'It does to me! If a man fails to do a certain work for want of power, it is only too easy to feel a sort of contemptuous pity: but if the failure be due to a determined sense of duty in the opposing scale, we are bound to respect and admire.'

'Very well, my dear, I have no objection, I am sure. We shall probably see very little more of him: he is out of our world, and has refused the right of entry. By the way, Alison, Miss Randolph has been talking to me.'

'Well, papa, that is no uncommon thing.'

'Not in itself: but the subject of conversation was rather uncommon. She spoke of her nephew—and you.'

Mr. Wycherley watched his daughter's face, and was rewarded by the sight of a hot, uncomfortable flush.

'You can imagine the rest, my dear.'

'What do you want me to say, papa?'

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'Nay, I expect nothing. I shall not forestall Mr. Randolph.'

'Papa, I wouldn't have him speak to me for the world!'

Mr. Wycherley looked uncomfortable.

'I thought you liked him very much.'

'So I do—as a friend. I would not marry him on any account.'

'Why not, pray? He is a gentleman, handsome—so the women say: in a good position, and likely to be in a better. He is his aunt's heir. What possible objection can you have?'

The inquiry was so genuine, that Alison, despite her annoyance, could not restrain a smile.

'There are other things which I should like my husband to have.'

'And what are they?'

'Power to win me, which Mr. Randolph neither has nor ever will have,' she answered, with assumed lightness. It was not a subject on which she could dilate to her father.

Mr. Wycherley looked dissatisfied, but wisely dropped the conversation, solacing himself with the reflection that women rarely knew their own minds till they were forced to decide one way or the other.

Alison knew better; her mind was settled pretty strongly, and the reasons for the decision were matters of long past consideration and thought. If Mr. Randolph rashly brought his suit forward it would meet with an uncompromising refusal.

It was nearly a fortnight before she was able to pay her promised visit to little Sybil, and then her father did not accompany her. The country was lovely with flower and foliage, and the little cottage garden was gay and sweet. The child was playing among the gilly-flowers, and flew to meet her, clapping her hands with pretty childish delight.

'You have not forgotten me then?' said Alison, stooping to kiss her. 'It is a long time since you saw me, you dear little thing!'

A respectable young woman, a trained nurse, whom Gower had engaged to take charge of his little daughter, came forward and asked her to walk into the pretty room, with its old-fashioned but comfortable furniture.

She looked round with some curiosity, and much interest, trying to read somewhat of the character of the owner from his

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belongings. There were books on the shelf, but she would not touch one.

The child gave her plenty of employment, for her illness had made her exacting—not unpleasantly so, but with the sweet wilful egoism which makes us smile while we yield. There was very much, too, in her chatter which was new to Alison: a refinement of accent and choice of expression which spoke of a different companionship.

Suddenly Sybil started up with a cry of surprise. 'My papa, and Mr. Lyon!'

Alison rose, annoyed, and for the moment confused. She had timed her visit when she believed the child would be alone, knowing that the father spent his days in town. Lyon came in first, and she met him with recovered self-possession. He was surprised, but did not show it; her annoyance she did not try to hide.

'I understood that neither you nor Mr. Gower were here in the daytime,' she said with a distinct inflexion of hauteur. Believing that it was his intention to drop the acquaintance she would not have him think she wished to continue it. Her tone made Lyon feel as if he ought to apolgise for their intrusion; at any rate account for it, which he did in a few words. Then he turned to the doorway which was darkened by Gower's shadow. Some sort of introduction seemed necessary; but he was not prepared for the sudden change which came over Alison's face. She turned white, even to the lips, and then he saw Gower's arms around her, and heard his kisses rained on brow and cheek. He stood for a moment stunned, and then walked out into the sunshine, leaving them alone.

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CHAPTER XLII.

'HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.'

MEETING the nurse outside he gave Sybil into her charge, and then went down the little garden behind the house, and sat on a rustic seat, hidden from view by a cluster of lilacs. He understood perfectly the meaning of the scene he had just witnessed; but he could not quite comprehend the effect it had had upon him. As he sat, silently working out the problem with curious, persistent self-questioning, the answer came. It was a prophecy of the future which had come over him like a cloud. He saw his own life—one of lonely toil—and in vivid contrast he saw Gower's, or as he must now learn to call him, Guy Wycherley's. The fact of a separation he had long foreseen, but not such an one as this. To the sensitive care-worn man it came doubly hard that the man he had lifted from the very dregs, the one he had rescued from ignominy and shame, should walk, unchallenged, unreproved, nay, welcome, where he had no hope of entrance. His friendship for Guy was true and tried, but he would have been more than human if, at that moment, there had not been some touch of bitterness in the thought that no matter what a man did, the accident of birth rose superior to all. Guy, with his wasted, almost ruined life, his list of reckless deeds, and memory of degradation, was still in the eyes of society a gentleman, and as such entitled to its recognition and respect, while he might perhaps, by dint of years of persistent effort, be accorded a scant and unwilling toleration. It was not a pleasant thought, but it was the truth, and he did not attempt to disguise it.

But it was not on the world at large that his thoughts dwelt; for the supercilious opinions of society generally he had a profound scorn, caring little for its censure or approval. True, he was not invulnerable, and there were times when even the miserable attempts at patronage on the part of moneyed idiots

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had their sting; it was galling to feel that social superiority claimed the right to approve or condemn according to its more or less shallow notions. This must not be mistaken; no man was more ready to render respect where it was due on tenable ground, and few had less of the genuine Radicalism of the day. There was a vein of Conservatism running through his composition, which preserved him doubtless from the pitfall of extreme partisanship. A communist he could never have been, for though he believed in universal brotherhood as he believed in universal charity, he held in utter contempt the communist's doctrine of universal equality. His own life was too obvious a confutation.

As he sat in the shadow of the lilacs the horizon of his thoughts was Alison Wycherley. No man can be always great; there is no level road along the tops of mental mountains. The religious enthusiast, after his brief vision of the land of Canaan, descends into the valley of petty cares; the philanthropist forgets the claims of prisoners in the claims of creditors, and the price of coal is apt to disturb the equanimity of the high-souled vindicator of social rights. So Lyon, at times, came down among the busy mortal crowd and made good his claim to the name of human, by his human littlenesses, as well as his human greatnesses. Of course he ought to have been above such weakness as to allow his thoughts to rest on any one or thing short of idealic perfection, but he was not. The beauty of the golden sunlight, the budding loveliness of tree and flower, suggested no higher truth than this, '*She* is his sister,' and the question followed,—'What will be the result to me of Guy's disclosure of the past?'

His name, shouted in no mistakable tone, roused him from his reverie, and Guy's handsome, merry face appeared, giving refutation to the unpalatable reflections of the past half-hour.

'Lyon, old fellow, don't tell me you knew it long ago! Here's a pretty spoiling of the plot. What am I to do with the sensational "going home!" the "return of the prodigal," which I have been working up with such elaboration and care? I'll make you a present of my notes, and you can work them into a three volume novel. I had imagined introducing you into the bosom of my family! Wonders will never cease! Why didn't you tell me you knew Alison and my father?'

'I did not know I knew your father,' replied Lyon, with outward composure but inward shrinking, as he looked down

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into Alison's happy eyes. 'Why did you not tell me you were Miss Wycherley's brother? Then I might have followed suit, and told my share.'

'I can scarcely believe it!' said Alison, stretching out her hand to him, with a certainty of sympathy which told that she read him aright. 'How strange that I should talk to you about Guy as I did. I little thought your Mr. Gower was my own dear brother! How should I when I thought he was in America. Guy, it was too bad of you!'

She spoke with loving reproach, but Guy laughed.

'I shall have to tell the whole story,' he said, drawing her hand through his arm, and looking at her, with a sudden tremulousness of lip. 'There is much to tell, Alison, and much that will be better untold. I say, it's too bad to expect a fellow to tell his own history! Here, Lyon, I shall hand it over to you.'

The characteristic boyish break could not conceal the moistening of the merry eyes, and Alison slipped her hand in his silently.

'I should make a bad historian,' replied Lyon; 'beside, my knowledge is of comparatively recent date.'

They went back to the house, and Sybil made her appearance in all the glory of white lace and pink ribbons. Guy was evidently proud of her.

'You will love her, Alison?'

There was just a touch of doubtful hesitancy in the tone, a half pleading look in the questioning eyes, while his arm folded more closely round the child.

Alison did not speak, but took her in her arms and dropped her face upon the sunny curls. It was answer enough, and Guy was satisfied.

The women were busy preparing tea, and Lyon would have left; but neither Guy nor Alison would hear of it. The mellow light of the evening sun filtered through the clustering leaves which framed the open window. Transparent china, shining silver, and clear cut glass made the tea-table a pleasant thing to look upon, and Guy crowned the effect by bringing in a vase of loveliest spring blossoms.

'But how did you manage about the letters? They certainly came from America!' said Alison, suddenly pausing in the act of pouring out the tea. 'It will come by degrees, I suppose; but at present I can only take in one fact. I am not quite sure

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that it is not all a dream, and presently I shall wake and find it gone!'

'Let me pinch you,' suggested her brother with comical eyes. 'I used to do it once, when you did not please me.'

'Never but once in your life, Guy, and then you were far more sorry than I, and gave me your best butterfly to make up. But the letters?'

'I sent them out to Fellows and he posted them from New York or wherever he happened to be,' confessed Guy, with very much the air of a naughty, penitent schoolboy.

'Oh Guy!'

'Oh Alison!'

'And you were in London all the time! If I had only known.'

'Be thankful you did not, dear. It would have given you anything but pleasure if you had seen me.'

'Tell me all about it, Guy.'

She slid her hand in his again, forgetting her duties in the new-found happiness. But he reminded her of the half-filled tea-cups, and recalled her wandering thoughts. He could not speak of the past then, and she saw it, and grew silent, half with fear. How he had learned to read her thoughts Lyon could not tell; but he saw the rising apprehension, and hastened to reassure her.

'And now all your brother has to do is to make up for lost time, and settle down to hard work. The experience of the past will help him to make good use of life. Your father will be glad to have his son once more at home, taking charge of the family name.'

She understood him, and gave him one quick glance of thanks. Whatever there was in Guy's past it would not affect the future, and their name was in no danger of disgrace. If it had been otherwise it would have killed her father. Intuitively she knew much that she had not yet been told. Lyon was her brother's friend, and gratitude, combined with her own anxious wish to be true to herself before him, gave her manner a sweet, shy charm. He had been so kind to Guy; he had saved his life; how could she be anything but grateful?

It was all very well for her, but dangerous for Lyon. He sat as if in a dream, listening to the sound of her voice, but rarely looking at her. He almost wished she would not be so solicitous for his comfort, so anxious to pay him every

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attention. It only made it all the harder for him. Even Guy took the second place; though under the circumstances it would have been excusable if she had forgotten all others in him. But dear as was Guy, she had not the anxious wish to please, the desire to make him feel at home and at ease, that she had for Lyon. As if she guessed somewhat of his feeling, and entered into it, she treated him with more than courtesy; there was an eager deference in her manner, which he could not but perceive. She was so fearful lest he should think she wished to keep in view the barrier of social position, when all her thought was to thank him for all he had done for Guy. All other feelings were in abeyance. But Lyon was too proud to take even the fee of her gratitude for what had been to him a plain though pleasant duty. That she should regard him as her brother's preserver was unavoidable: but he did not care to be reminded of the fact.

Guy told her much of the past, but did not then touch on the more painful subjects: it was not the time. He said little of Lyon, on account of his presence. They sat talking some little time after tea, and then sent to the inn near for the carriage in which Alison had come down.

'Don't refuse, old fellow,' said Guy, as he saw Lyon hesitate. 'We will put you down at whatever point you like; you must come with us.' So he went, and alighting at the nearest point to his own home left them to go on alone. As they neared home Guy grew silent. Alison sat holding his hand tightly, and talking to the child, trying to cover her agitation. What would her father say?

She found him in his usual seat, with the quiet, patient look on his face to which she was growing accustomed. She went to his side and knelt down, taking his hand in hers.

'Papa, I have heard such news of Guy!' He looked into her face, and saw the joy brimming over; and his hand began to tremble.

'Where is he? Bring—no, let me go to my boy,' he said, rising, and leaning heavily on the chair back. 'Guy, my boy!'

For Guy was at his side, too impetuous to wait the agreed signal. And the old man put his trembling hands in his son's young strong ones, and leaned for support against his broad shoulder, but could not speak. The surprise was too great, the joy too overwhelming. He sank into his seat and found

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his speech at last, and his first words told of the long repentance of the past.

'Forgive my harsh words, my boy! I did not mean them; I was in a passion!'

But this was more than poor Guy could stand.

'Oh, father, it is I who have to ask for forgiveness!' he cried, dropping his head on the old man's hand, as he knelt by his side. 'I was determined to quarrel,—there were reasons. I was ashamed to come home.'

'And she—your wife—where is she? I will try to love her, Guy, for your sake. Bring her here.'

The child Sybil was standing by his side, but he had not noticed her. Taking her little hand Guy drew her forward.

'Father, can you see no resemblance?'

He looked wonderingly down into the fair little face, and did not speak.

'Grandfather,' said the child, repeating her lesson. He lifted her on his knee.

'Guy's child! Guy's little girl!' he murmured, as he stroked the pretty head. 'I never knew it! I never guessed it! Yes, I can see it now. Your father's eyes. Why did I not see it before?'

'Why, I did see it!' cried Alison, with sudden recollection. 'Papa, don't you remember, I wondered why her face seemed so familiar! I saw a resemblance to someone, but could not determine to whom. Oh, Guy! to think she is your own little daughter. I am so glad.'

But Mr. Wycherley still waited, with anxious, expectant eyes. Guy answered quietly,—

'Sybil has only her father now. My wife is dead.'

Though he spoke the words so calmly there was a quivering of the lip which told of inward emotion.

'You will tell me all about her another time,' whispered his sister, pleadingly. He took the treasured case from his pocket, and opening it passed it without a word. The tears gathered fast in Alison's eyes as she saw, for the first time, the pictured face of her brother's sweet dead wife. It was so different from anything she had imagined. So young, with such a foreshadowing of the future resting on lips and brow. That Guy's low-born wife had been so beautiful had never seemed within the range of possibility, and she experienced a revulsion of feeling. There was no trace of the low-born actress, as she had

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so scornfully called the girl who had taken her brother from his home. That faultless head and exquisite face could not belong to the coarse and common order of mind which she had imagined. She held the case reverently, with a pang of self-reproach, feeling that in her thoughts and by them she had done unconscious injury.

Long into the night the reunited father and son sat talking, going over much of the painful past. With stern determination not to spare himself Guy told them of his downward course, step by step, to ruin. He told of the death of his girl-wife, and his dislike to the child; his casting aside every restraining consideration, and giving himself up to the fate of his own weak will. It was a painful story, and cost much to tell, though for their sakes he was silent on the darkest passages of his life. On one part he dwelt long; his acquaintance with Lyon.

'And the curious thing is,' he said, pushing back his now fair hair, with the old familiar gesture, 'that he met me, or I met him, pretty much the same time that you first knew him. What odd links do get into the chain of life! How little you suspected who Edward Gower was when you saw his name in the paper, in connection with the fire. And I heard the children talk of Miss Alis without any idea of the truth. How we do stumble along, blindfold! Father, how do you like my friend?'

'Mr. Lyon? I like him much, my son, and now I owe him a debt of gratitude which I shall never be able to pay! He has given me back my boy,' faltered the old man.

'Yes, that is true,' was the dreamy reply. 'He was the first to rouse my buried self-respect and nerve me to strong endeavour. He gave me some sharp cuts, but they had good effect. Yes, father, I think you may fairly say he has given you back your son.'

'He is a good man, Guy, a good man. I always respected him. But now——' and the old man paused, unable to continue.

'Yes, he is a good fellow, though he has some curious notions of his own. He might be a rich man if he liked, but he never will be. He has too much conscience; it is inconvenient for worldly advancement.'

'That is an uncommon failing,' said Alison.

'And therefore ought to be regarded as a virtue, eh, little

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sister?' replied her brother, caressingly. 'I am not disposed to quarrel with it, except that it stands in his way.'

'Heroes are not so numerous that we can afford to criticise them too harshly.'

'Well, I never heard anyone call Lyon a hero before! Don't let him hear you, Alison.'

'I am not likely to,' she answered, thinking how little he cared for anything she might say.

Never till that evening had Guy fully realised all that Lyon had done. The change in himself had not appeared so great in its gradual progress as now, when contrasting the present with the past. As he sat in the luxurious room, holding his father's hand, and looking down on his sister's sweet refined face, with its sensitive lines and curves, he pictured the entrance of a drunken, degraded sot, all his senses steeped in the stupor of habitual intoxication. He pictured the old man's grief and Alison's white-faced horror, and then he cursed himself, and shuddered, and started up to force away the vision. In the glass opposite he caught sight of his face, and so different was it from the one he had that moment seen that he was absolutely startled. It was the Guy of former years that he saw; the fair-haired, careless, *insouciant* Guy Wycherley, and Edward Gower began to fade away like a hideous nightmare. With a sigh of intense relief he sank back, seeing for the first time the full horrors of the fate he had escaped. It had needed this—the contrast of home, the sense of responsibility, the trusting love of father and sister, to show him all. He was silent; shading his face with his hand, he breathed one deep earnest thanksgiving. From that hour dated a new era in his life's history.

There was a quiet but happy breakfast party the next morning. Mr. Wycherley could not tire of watching his son's face, and he listened to his little grandchild's speeches with a proud delight pleasant to behold. There was still so much to tell and ask and wonder at that the hours passed unheeded.

'You must fetch Mr. Lyon here, my son,' he said; 'I shall not rest content till I have seen him. Go and tell him—nay, I will tell him myself—that words are inadequate to express all I would wish him to understand. Your home will always have wide-open doors for him.'

He repeated this, with much more, when Lyon came up in the evening. But Alison uttered no word of thanks; she

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could not. Sitting in her low seat, with her hand clasped in her brother's, she was content to listen and be silent. There was something very much akin to exultation in her mind when she heard her father's earnest words. Her hero was to a certain extent vindicated; even her father was forced to yield him admiration and respect. She gloried in it, and marked with pride that the despised man of the people could hold his own even with Guy, whose argumentative and conversational powers had always excited her girlish respect. And then came the inevitable contrast: to one of her keen, thoughtful calibre it was impossible that these two men should fail to occupy their distinct relative positions. She saw them in the light of experience and not experiment. Long trial had proved the stuff of which each was made, and the one had battled up, and the other had weakly fallen.

'And yet,' she thought, with indignation, 'Guy would take precedence of him in the eyes of the world! He is good and noble, but *they* do not care for such things! Never mind; I will honour him, for he is worthy of it. Yes, he is a hero; my hero!'

And so John Lyon took his place, and though he did not know it, became what most men become once in their lives—a woman's hero.

He little thought it; to him the earnest eyes spoke only of interest in her brother's past, and perhaps of gratitude to her brother's preserver. The latter gave him no pleasure. He had no wish for gratitude from her.

'I shall not let you drop me now, old fellow,' said Guy, laying his hand on Lyon's shoulder, after a restless walk up and down the room. 'I know what an one you are for work, but you must find some leisure for us. Friendship, especially such as ours, has claims. You will not ignore them?'

He spoke with some degree of anxiety, not feeling sure whether or not Lyon would interpose some supposed duty in the way of what he might look upon as only pleasure. He had not the slightest idea either in what light he regarded his father and sister. From Alison's account he was inclined to think he had no wish to continue the acquaintance. But circumstances in this case might very materially affect him, and he was not disposed to let him go.

'I should be the last to ignore the claims of friendship,' replied Lyon, after a moment's hesitation. Looking up he met

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Guy's eyes, and then with mutual impulse their hands met in a firm, warm grasp.

Ashamed of a sudden quivering of his unmanageable under lip, Guy turned away. It was an unusual thing for him to show feeling, but the circumstances were unusual, and the memory of the past was very vivid just then. The next minute he was joking in the old light, careless way, for to be serious long was not in Guy Wycherley's buoyant nature. Besides, life was looking bright to him, and *couleur de rose* is apt to raise the spirits. He was delighted to see how readily Lyon seemed to fit into the family, and with what evident pleasure and interest his father entered into conversation with him. It was just as it should be; his friend would always find cordial welcome at his home. He had been a little doubtful on this point, remembering only too well his father's strong prejudice against mixture of classes; he had good cause to remember it. But Lyon was appreciated, and he was well-satisfied.

It was late before he would suffer him to leave, and then tried to bind him by a promise of an early visit.

'You will spend Sunday with us?' he urged; but Lyon shook his head. Sunday was one of his busiest days.

'I will come when I can, and you must not quite forsake old quarters. One little face will grow rather long when I make your change of residence known.'

'Winter? Haven't you told him?'

'No; I did not know what you might wish me to say about it.'

'Guy, you must bring that little boy here. I should like to see him,' said Mr. Wycherley, who had heard of the little fellow's gallant conduct. 'You must do something for him, my son.'

'He is in better hands than mine, father; but I do intend to look after him. Lyon has plenty of others to care for.'

Lyon felt that he had done an unwise thing, but circumstances were too strong for him. He had no excuse for withdrawing from Guy's friendship, and he had no wish to do it.

As she wished him good-night, Alison faltered a few words of thanks. She knew that she was misunderstood, that he attributed her silence to a wrong cause, but could not force herself to speak. The misinterpretation, which she saw plainly in his face, hurt her deeply, but she let it remain.

'If he will think the worst of me, he must,' she said to herself, with an attempt at self-consolation. 'Perhaps in time he will understand me better.'

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CHAPTER XLIII.

'WILL YOU STRETCH OUT NO HAND TO SAVE?'

LYON felt the absence of Guy and the little one more than he had thought possible. The boys, too, Willie and Dick, missed their little playmate, and the former grew melancholy.

Finding him, one day, looking forlorn and miserable, he took him into his own room and set him to work to copy some notes. Finding he was really of use, the boy was pleased, and began to take interest in it. But a change was at hand. Guy Wycherley had not forgotten his chivalrous little squire. He made arrangements for him to go to a first-class grammar school, where he would receive a good mercantile education. Here, in the companionship of boys of his own age and intelligence he developed rapidly, and took a high position, which he maintained to the end of his school career.

Lyon took another quick, clever boy, friendless and homeless, to fill his place, and he and Dick were soon friends. But his home had no home-atmosphere in it now. He came in at night, but with the slow, weary step of one who has no anticipation of home rest and peace. The lonely, silent room had no power to attract. So he buried himself in work, and grew day by day more absorbed.

'You are working too hard,' Mrs. Chester said to him one day. 'I can see it in your face. Do you think it is right to peril your health?'

'Better to wear out than rust out,' he answered. 'I cannot make a plaything of my life.'

'But do you believe that life is meant only for work?'

'I believe that some are happier at work.'

'That is an evasion, Mr. Lyon.'

'No; I am thinking of myself. I believe work is the best thing for me.'

'If you do not overdo it,' she said, anxiously.

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But despite the friendly warnings of those around him, Lyon silently pursued his chosen course, finding in hard work relief from the almost constant mental strain. Night after night he fought his way down into the lowest depths of city infamy and crime, speaking stern words to the hardened, and kind ones of encouragement to those who needed them.

Of the Wycherleys he saw little. Guy was occupied in trying to regain what he had lost, and could not afford the time to run down often. They met occasionally, and Guy did his utmost to persuade him to become a frequent visitor at his home, and at last grew hurt at the persistent refusal.

'Lyon means to cut me, I believe,' he said to Alison one evening, throwing himself petulantly on the couch. 'It's no use asking him up; he is such a confoundedly independent fellow. I believe he is afraid of you, Alison.'

'Afraid!' she echoed, sceptically.

'No, not exactly afraid; but he may fancy you look down upon him, and all that sort of thing. He is awfully proud.'

'I am sure I have never given him any reason to think so, Guy. Besides, I do not look down upon him, as you call it.'

'His social position, I mean.'

'I know; but he might make that pretty much what he liked. Have you seen him to-day?'

'Yes; I wanted him to come up to-morrow, but he has "a meeting."'

'I know it. It is advertised in the paper.'

'It is some public meeting then? I thought it was one of his costermongers' classes—a mere put off.'

'No; he is advertised among the list of speakers at a total abstinence meeting. Some temperance movement, I suppose.'

'Where is the paper?'

She passed it to him, and he read the announcement aloud. 'I have a good mind to go,' he said, after a pause.

'I wish I could go,' said Alison, without looking up from her work.

'Well, what prevents you?'

'I do not think papa would like it.'

'Nonsense. Hundreds of ladies will be there. I will take you, if you like.'

'I should like.'

'Then we will go. I have never heard old Lyon address a large meeting. I daresay father would like to hear him, too.'

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He put the question to Mr. Wycherley when he came in, and received the answer he had expected.

The next night they went to the Hall and found it filling fast. They managed to get good seats near the platform, and then Alison looked about her with interest.

It was quite a novel gathering to her. There was the usual mixture; the upper classes in front, and the motley crowd behind. It was the latter which especially attracted her attention; it reminded her of Lyon. As the various speakers, men whose names were familiar to her, took their places on the platform, she watched eagerly for one well-known face; but it did not appear.

'Lyon is late!' whispered Guy. 'I hope he is not going to disappoint us.'

The meeting began, and still Lyon was absent. The first speaker did not rouse much interest, and Alison began to wish she had not come. But presently her attention was riveted, and she forgot all in the excitement produced by a stirring and eloquent speech. She had in the past regarded the advocates of total abstinence as annoying fanatics, when met with in her own class, but had never taken the trouble to consider the question. Guy's history had effected a certain change in her views, but she was not prepared for the overwhelming torrent of argument which could be brought to bear upon the subject. She listened with rapidly deepening convictions, as speech succeeded speech, and fact after fact was brought before her. So deeply was she interested, that it was with a feeling of disappointment she heard the chairman speak of the lateness of the hour. While he was still speaking there was a slight bustle near the side door by the platform, and then she saw Lyon's massive head towering above the crowd. As he stepped up to the platform a ringing cheer greeted him. The deafening noise startled Alison, and she looked round to see what was the matter.

'What are you clapping for, Guy?' she asked, seeing her brother as energetically employed as any.

'They are cheering Lyon. That tells a tale, Alison, doesn't it? They would not cheer many men like that.'

Alison felt her heart give one quick throb of mingled pride and excitement, and then she looked at Lyon. He stood at the corner of the platform, waiting silently for them to be quiet. There was something in his face which had a strange influence,

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and the clapping suddenly ceased. Some at the back continued to shout for 'Mr. Lyon's speech,' but those nearer, who could see his face, hushed them down. He looked pale and stern, and there was a nervous twitch of the corners of the mouth which told its own tale to those who knew him. Stooping down he took from the arms of a woman who had followed him in a little bundle, and advanced with it to the edge of the platform.

'You ask for my speech,' he said, and his voice, though low with repressed emotion, rang clear through the hall. 'Mothers of England, here is my speech.'

He held towards them a little child—a baby. An awful-looking baby! It stretched out its tiny arms, clutched the air with its claw-like hands, and then was still, gazing before it with wide-open, vacant eyes. The little face was like nothing human; weird and old and wizened, it retained not one trace of babyish grace. A dead silence fell upon the audience.

'Not a quarter of a mile from this hall lies the dead body of a drunkard's wife, murdered in a drunken fight by her own husband. This is their child.'

A young mother, sitting near Alison, uttered a faint cry, and clasped her own beautiful baby passionately to her heart. A young man, sitting beside her, passed his hand hastily across his eyes and then bent down and whispered something in her ear.

Alison looked and wondered, and a mist gathered before her eyes. She saw Lyon stoop, and lower the baby with gentle hands to the woman who was waiting for it, and then turn again to the front. There was no noise now; no cheering or clapping. All was hushed expectancy.

'A piece of sensationalism, some will call it, and they are right. But it is a sensationalism which belongs to real life and not to fiction. It is easy for the accustomed pen to write of scenes of horror, and work up tragedies to excite the languid interest of the *blasé* novel reader. It is of trifling moment to you that one, two, three columns of your morning paper are taken up—"wasted"—by police-court reports of similar tragedies, couched in ordinary terse police-report language. Run your eye carelessly down those uninteresting columns to-morrow, and you may chance to see a brief account of an ordinary, uninteresting occurrence—the murder of a wife in a drunken fight. What of it? Nothing to you. Are you your

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brother's keeper? Besides, you do not care to hear of such things; they tend to lower the mind, disturb the calm serenity of the mental atmosphere, disgust you with humanity. God has consulted your feelings and natural tendencies by placing you above and beyond such horrors, and why should you fly in the face of Providence by seeking out what He has hidden from your sight? Pleasant reasoning! ingenious but disingenuous argument. *Has* He hidden them from your sight? *does* He intend that you should remain in ignorance? If so, then why do they appear side by side with the stock exchange column, which no man can bring himself to believe is not intended for his especial perusal, or with a speech from your leader, which of course you must read as a matter of duty? Strange dispensation of Providence that a man may read one column of his morning paper and not another! No business of yours? Certainly not! It is no business of yours that your countrymen and women are reeling by thousands and tens of thousands into the valley of death, into the jaws of hell! It is nothing to you that your country—the fatherland of which the home-sick exile dreams—is crushed and bruised, its ancient glory tarnished, and its proud fame blighted by the unutterable horror of a terrible curse. The curse of a nation's sin. If the news were to come that the enemy was invading our shores, and our national freedom was threatened, the clang of weapons would be heard over all the land, and the long disused sword would be drawn from its sheath, for every man would burn with the fever-fire of war, and rise to defend his country and his home. But while white-winged peace is brooding over the land, a far more dangerous foe than a hostile army is allowed unmolested to wind its insidious way among the happy homes of England. The doors alike of hall and cottage fly open at its approach, and its silent entry once made, it oftentimes remains a guest till the icy hand of death is laid upon the heart of its last ruined victim. And yet, no hand is raised to bar its entrance. In its fair and attractive guise it receives from all unparalleled welcome. The father glories in its presence, and the mother lays her jewelled hand upon the monster which is luring her bright boy to his death. Home after home is devastated, the fair fame of mother, wife, and daughter dragged in the dust, the honour of manhood degraded, and the innocence and purity of childhood stained and polluted! Old age loses its title to reverence, and the little child inspires horror. What is doing it? It is England's

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curse—the genius of strong drink. I dare not tell you all that I have seen; there are times when I dare not *think* of it. In your well-bred respectability you deem yourself secure from a common danger. I could take you *now* and show you the idolised son of a titled lady lying in the horrors of delirium tremens. I could show you the only hope of an ancient house drunk in a garret. I could point out by scores, men—ah, and women, too—lost, ruined, and degraded, who have fallen down into the depths, and, in company with a countless multitude, are hurrying on to the drunkard's grave! Men and women who were once such as you. You say all this is nothing to you. Let me ask you one question. Have you, in your own immediate family, or among those bound to you by ties of relationship or friendship, *one* who has succumbed to the influence of the all-conquering demon of Intemperance? *One*, I say; how many of you dare answer, "*only one*"? Then, it is something to you. You may shut your ears to the wail which is rising from a thousand wretched homes! You may refuse to hear the moan of the drunkard's wife, the sobs of the drunkard's children; you may close your eyes to the ghastly record of murders, crimes, diseases, accidents, all attributable to one giant cause; but the time *may* come when even your ears will be strained to their utmost to catch the sound of a staggering footstep. Up the broad staircase, down the long corridor, while the father's grey head is bowed with shame and grief, and the mother sobs out her anguish on her pillow, and the young sisters raise their heads and listen with bated breath and paling cheek. Such will be the coming home to-night of many a once-promising boy, of many a mother's only son. Is your home safe? Have you built up such battlements that no child of yours can fall? Remember that the danger is a hidden one; even you, with all your experience of life, cannot, or *will not* detect it lurking in the sparkling draught which your own hand pours out for that bonnie little lad at your side. A glass of wine can do him no harm, you say. But can you guarantee that the growing liking for it will do him no harm? Can you say confidently that the midnight hour will never bring that boy reeling home to wring your heart with bitter grief? You cannot. Then, again, I repeat, the curse *is* something to you. The genius of strong drink hovers over every home! its black wings droop alike over rich and poor, old and young. Last night I saw a man of rank and position, one of the aristocracy,

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dancing like a mountebank in the streets, with a policeman on either side of him, "running him in." What did that mean? Disgrace, and misery, and shame in somebody's home. To-night I have seen a trembling sot stand, with blood-stained hands, by the side of his murdered wife. The two extremes of society, and the exulting demon claiming both! It is useless to argue in the face of facts. Our land is under a curse; day by day fresh links are added to a mighty chain which is binding us down to a slavery worse than death. I am not exaggerating; and I will tell you why:—Because I do not know, and cannot even conjecture, one tithe of the woe, and want, and sin which follow in the train of this monster evil. I see among this audience, here and there, the faces of little children. It is possible, nay, probable, that some of them do not know the taste of alcohol; it is possible, nay probable, that some know it too well. What will their future be? Can you tell? It may be well for you that you cannot. If, in the time to come, that brave, noble boy, that winsome little girl, make shipwreck of hope, and fall into the abyss of eternal ruin, it will be for you to bow your heads in all the terrible anguish of self-condemnation and cry: "*I* taught my boy to love the cup which brought him death! My son! my son! would to God that I had died for thee!" Are you prepared for such a black midnight ending to your day of life? If not, rise up and join the Crusade against your nation's foe and *yours*—the spirit of strong drink.

"Is it nothing to you, though that spirit
Walks to and fro through the land,
Scattering the seeds of mischief
Broadcast on every hand?
Those seeds are yielding a harvest
Of poverty, death, and woe,
Of ignorance, crime, and madness,—
And *you* are helping to sow!

"Ye have the gift of knowledge,
Ye are standing fast in your strength;
But that which is now your servant
May be your tyrant at length.
For art has lost its cunning,
And learning has ceased to shine,
And the light of religion been darkened,
Before that spirit of wine.

"Will you teach your children's voices
To utter the Saviour's prayer;

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'Lead us not into temptation,"
And then, lead and leave them there?
The path is slippery and treacherous,
Which they see you safely pursue;
But *they* may follow and perish—
And, is this nothing to you?

'"There are thousands struggling before you
In the dark and fearful wave,
Which hurries them on to destruction—
Will you stretch out no hand to save?
Will you turn from the wife's wild anguish,
From the cry of the children too,
And say, from your place of safety,
That this is nothing to you?"

You may say it, but ask your own heart if you believe it. I see before me representatives of nearly all grades of society. Science, literature, art, commerce, are all affected by this social curse, and from their ranks men have stepped forward to-night to hear, and, perhaps, to heed. Much has been said, no doubt, to convince the reason; whether successfully or unsuccessfully you know best. There is no time for me to enter into the question now. I would merely bring once more before you the fact that this evil is not to be put down by single effort but by united Christendom. Take your stand to-night; pledge yourself to undying effort; raise the battlements of total abstinence round your own happy homes, and your hands will then be guiltless of your children's blood. Do you refuse? Do you prefer to hush the alarm and close your ears to the exulting song of the spirit of drink, as he sweeps through the land, gathering up by thousands the stalwart men, proud England's hearts of oak, the brave boys, and even worse, the women and the girls? Is this your will? But while the song ascends there mingles with it the wail of misery from a myriad wretched homes:—

'"Drink, drink, drink!
Let the convict ship swim deep;
Drink, drink, drink!
What matters it who may weep?
It's oh! to be drunk with wine,
As well as with beer and gin;
Let the Temperance fools rave on as they
Against the nation's sin.

'"Drink, drink, drink!
Open wider yet the door;

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Drink, drink, drink !
Who cares to be sick or poor ?
It's oh ! for a greater flood
Of the glorious, maddening drink,
Though the young and fair be swept away,
And down to perdition sink.

'" Drink, drink, drink !
The revenue must be had ;
Drink, drink, drink !
Of that which makes men mad !
It's oh ! to be drunk with wine,
To increase the mad drinking crew ;
Though poverty, crime, and disease may increase,
And madness and murder too.

'" Drink, drink, drink !
Let the poor-house and mad-house be filled !
Drink, drink, drink !
Though thousands more be killed :
It's oh ! to be free from thought—
To be deaf to our children's cry—
To banish for ever the fear and remorse,
As in rags and in filth they die.

'" Drink, drink, drink !
That's the reform we want :
Drink, drink, drink !
List not to the Temperance cant !
It's oh ! to be mocked by wine,
And to be to this drink a slave ;
To be without heart, and soul, and mind,
And sink to a drunkard's grave !" '

There had been far more eloquent speeches given that evening, but not one that had received such enthusiastic applause. Fraught with a burning intensity, each word had gone straight to the hearts of the hearers, stirring the depths of feeling and rousing many an accusing conscience. Perhaps personal knowledge had something to do with the effect. There were many there who knew that this was no elaborated speech to suit the occasion, but a passionate outburst of pent-up emotion from a heart too noble to counterfeit, too true to dissemble. His was no feigned interest, neither was it an evanescent one excited by circumstances for the moment, only. He had 'the courage of his convictions,' and his words were the language of his heart.

As the noise subsided, Mr. Chester rose, and was warmly received. He shook his head, and raised his hand deprecatingly.

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'No, no! not a speech; not a speech. Only this—God speed our grand crusade! God send us willing hearts and working hands. May the white flag of total abstinence float side by side with the blood-stained banner of the Cross over the battlements of every home. May the time soon come when all England shall shout, exultant over a conquered foe, and the voice of the drunkard shall be no more heard in our streets. A friend of mine, whose face I caught sight of at the back there a few minutes ago, calls his regiment the Coldstream Guards! A very good name, but I think I know a better. God speed our grand Crusade, and swell the number of our gallant Life Guards!'

The word was caught up at once by those behind, and rang through the Hall. Pleased and excited Alison turned to look at the sea of faces. The clapping rather bewildered her, unused as she was to demonstrative public meetings. Then, through all the tumult she heard a well-known voice, and Lyon stood by her side.

'I have fought my way through,' he said, looking down, with the rare smile which so wondrously changed his whole expression, giving his stern, impassive face a gentleness, and softening the resolute curves. 'I did not expect to see you here.'

'I am glad we came,' she answered, her eyes full of a glad sympathy. Her hero had spoken as became him, and it was enough. He turned to her father and brother, and then they rose to go. She felt her hand drawn within his arm with a protectiveness that seemed in keeping with his massive shoulders and towering head. Guy was piloting his father. The crush was great, but at last they stood in the cool night air. The firm pressure against her hand then relaxed, and he handed her into the carriage, but withstood all Guy's entreaties to accompany them home. It was late, and he had work to do.

'The old story!' cried Guy, petulantly. 'I shall come down and fetch you to-morrow.'

'What a hard life that man does live,' said Mr. Wycherley, as they rode home.

'A grand life, papa!'

'That is as you take it. It would not suit all.'

'I know it. Few have sufficient self-sacrificing nobility of character!'

'What a champion for Lyon! Alison, I will tell him; but he is not a "Ladies' Committee Man,"' said her brother, amused

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at her warmth. 'We shall have you advocating total abstinence next!'

'I mean to advocate it,' she answered.

'And so do I,' was the quiet reply, and under shelter of the darkness the brother and sister clasped hands of loving compact.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

'HE LOVED HER.'

'YOU don't believe in this world's glorified deity? do you?' was Guy's greeting the following evening.

'What is his name?' asked Lyon.

'"Gold! bright and yellow, hard and cold!
Price of many a crime untold," &c.

You know him.'

'A very limited acquaintance. What has he been doing?'

'Honouring your humble servant.'

'I am glad to hear it. What is it: a post or legacy?'

'A legacy, my dear fellow. A crotchety old uncle, who hitherto has not even acknowledged our existence, has kindly jotted down our names in his will to the tune of five thousand each. Better than nothing, isn't it?'

'You and your sister?'

'Yes. Seriously, it is a God-send to me just now, Lyon.'

'It is, because you must necessarily keep up a certain position. Except by your pen you will not earn money yet awhile.'

'That is the worst of a barrister's life. He has to wait such a confoundedly long time. Perhaps twenty years hence I may have something of a reputation. We ought to leave Highbury; I don't like it. I want your advice about that.'

'About what?'

'Where to go. Alison and I have been talking it over this morning. I am going to take you back with me.'

Lyon looked up quickly. 'I really cannot come, Wycherley. I am sorry.'

'Nonsense! What have you to do?'

'Many things. My work is getting behindhand. I have been out so much lately.'

'Not to us. Look here, Lyon, I am not going to allow this

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to go on. What do you mean by it? You never come near us unless I force you, and then you leave as early as you dare. Do you wish to throw me on one side now? By Jove! if you do, I'll carry a bottle of brandy about, with the neck sticking out of my pocket to frighten you into looking after me again.'

The tone was half-laughing, but there was an under-current of seriousness in it. After waiting in vain for an answer, he went on:

'I shall not let you go lightly, Lyon. If you won't come to me I shall come to you: that is all.'

'I wish you would.'

'Oh! then you do not object to me! Who is it? I told Alison she had offended your lordship in some way. What has she done?'

'Nothing,' said Lyon, steadily, dipping his pen in the ink and going on with his writing.

Guy began to look hurt. 'I did not expect this, Lyon.'

A look of pain crossed Lyon's face, and throwing down the pen, he rose and began pacing the room.

'Rampaging about like a wild beast,' murmured Guy, stretched at full length on the couch.

Suddenly Lyon stopped before him. 'Can you imagine no other reason for my repeated refusal to visit your home?' he asked, with the quietness of a great mental repression.

Guy raised himself on his elbow and gazed at him with a glimmering of astonished, incredulous comprehension.

'My dear fellow, you don't——'

'Why not?' interrupted Lyon, sharply, with again the look of pain. 'You know what she is, and I—well I am only human.'

Guy dropped back upon the cushion speechless, while Lyon continued his restless walk.

'Why should you be so astonished? it is only a natural consequence,' he said at length. 'I am taking it in time.'

'I can't help the astonishment, old fellow! the idea never entered my head. Why, she thinks you don't like her!'

A faint smile trembled for a moment on Lyon's lips. 'I have succeeded beyond my intentions then.'

Again there was a long silence, while he sat down and resumed his writing. Guy watched him with troubled eyes. He did not believe his sister had any other feeling than that

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of friendship for him, and he himself was so taken by surprise that he did not, in his bewilderment, know what to think or say.

'Don't trouble yourself about it,' said Lyon, without raising his head. 'I have told you in order to explain what was rather a riddle to you. Come and see me as often as you can, and let the rest go.'

'It is easy to talk,' replied Guy, restlessly. 'You are not letting it go.'

The shot went home, and Lyon winced. He *could not* let it go. '"Yet love not told, and only born of absence and by thought, with thought and absence may return to nought,"' he answered, briefly. 'Don't worry about me, Guy. Prove me friendship's worth by silent sympathy.'

He tried to smile, but failed. Guy sprang up and stretched out his hand. 'I cannot say anything about Alison, but for myself, dear old fellow, I would rather call you brother than any other man in England.'

The genuine sympathy in the honest eyes and warm hand-clasp went straight to Lyon's heart, and for a moment he could not trust himself to speak. Tossing the pen on one side he rose abruptly.

'I am in no mood for work to-night. I will walk part of the way with you, Guy.'

They went out together, talking of indifferent things. When they parted Lyon went to one of the worst dens of iniquity in London. Guy went home. He found his father alone; Alison was entertaining Miss Ripon.

'Where is Mr. Lyon?'

'Engaged as usual,' he replied carelessly.

'What a strange life the man lives!' said Mr. Wycherley, who found in Lyon a never-failing source of wonderment. 'Does he mean to forswear all society? He might as well enter a monastery.'

'Not quite.'

'I mean as far as his own pleasure is concerned. Why does he not marry and make a home as other men do? He is too fine a fellow to go on as he is now. Why don't you use your influence with him, Guy?'

'And find him a wife? My dear sir, that is a difficult sort of thing to do. Besides, I only know one girl good enough for Lyon, and that is Alison.'

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Mr. Wycherley looked startled. 'My dear boy, pray do not put that into your sister's head.'

'She might do worse, father.'

'And she might, and I hope will, do very much better.'

'She will never marry that Randolph,' cried Guy.

'Why not?'

'He's such a——' Guy paused. 'Never mind; she will never have him. But suppose she and Lyon were to do as sinful mortals will,—fall in love as the novels say,—what then?'

'I hope they will do nothing so foolish! I respect and honour Mr. Lyon, but I should be sorry for his sake if he were to allow himself to entertain any such views with regard to your sister.'

'He is not likely to entertain any views. But, father, you must remember that he is a rising man.'

'He might be if he would. Surely you are not seriously contemplating anything of that sort, Guy,' said Mr. Wycherley, alarmed. 'He has not evinced any regard for your sister.'

'I never said he had, but when a girl sees much of a man like Lyon she is very apt to exalt him into a hero; that is all. Stranger things have happened.'

'Alison is too sensible. It could not be thought of for a moment.'

'Would you act the cruel father and refuse your consent?' said Guy, lightly.

'I should refuse my consent unquestionably, unless Mr. Lyon took a very different course from the one he is now pursuing.'

'What would you have him do?'

'I would have him leave his present life, and devote himself to the higher walks of literature, in which he might easily win a name for himself. He could not in honour ask any gently-nurtured girl to share his home now, Guy.'

'He neither could nor would. But you have no objection to him personally, father? He is a noble fellow.'

'Not to him personally. I like him much.'

The conversation dropped, and presently Guy went upstairs. As he passed his sister's door she looked out. 'Has Mr. Lyon come, Guy?'

He followed her in and sat down. 'No, he has not,' he answered, shortly. 'Were you going to put on some frills and furbelows?'

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She laughed, but coloured. 'Not for Mr. Lyon! He would never know whether I had a black or white dress on. Why will he not come here, Guy? Have I offended him?'

Guy looked at her. 'Alison, my father particularly wishes me not to put anything into your head about John Lyon: so if if you please, my dear, we will change the topic of conversation.'

Alison's colour deepened. 'You stupid boy!'

'Oh, abuse me as much as you like, but I must decline to put any ideas into your head.'

'Do be serious, Guy! Why won't Mr. Lyon come?

'My dear child, Lyon has some curious fancies, and one of them is that coming here may interfere in some way with his work.'

'And we have not offended him in any way? I was afraid we had; he has been so cold and distant.'

Guy found himself on dangerous ground, and beat a retreat. More troubled than she cared to own, even to herself, Alison went downstairs. It was evident that their friendship was little valued, and it was natural that she should feel hurt. The truth was very far from her thoughts, and Guy's joking had been to her but the merest joking.

Restless and dissatisfied with the uncomfortable state of things, it was not long before Guy went down again, and found Lyon at home, but not at work. Mr. Tremaine was standing at the window, drumming impatiently upon the pane with his finger tips.

'What is the matter?' cried Guy, gazing in astonishment from one to the other. 'Who is your patient now, Tremaine?'

'He is,' replied the doctor, briefly nodding at Lyon.

'What has he been doing?'

'Oh, nothing! only working himself to death, that's all!'

Lyon laughed. Guy sat down on the table and looked at him. 'Now, Lyon, what is it? Tell the truth and shame the devil.'

'The truth is only this. I have been overdoing it lately, and Tremaine orders me to knock off work altogether, and go to the seaside or into the country.'

'All right, my boy, I'll go with you. When shall we start?'

Mr. Tremaine left off drumming on the pane and turned round. 'There are some sensible men in the world! He ought to be out of London to-night, Mr. Gower—beg pardon, Mr. Wycherley.'

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'And so he shall. Where's your portmanteau, Lyon?'

'It is impossible, Guy.'

'Where is your portmanteau?'

'If he will promise to go to-morrow or early next week,' said the doctor, doubtfully.

'I will promise,' said Lyon, wearily. Mr. Tremaine looked at Guy and nodded. 'Too tired to speak, you see, yet wants to go to work! I shall leave it in your hands now.'

He wished them good-night and went out. Guy sat still and whistled. 'The very place!' he suddenly exclaimed, and drawing pen and ink forward exchanged his seat for a lower one, and began to write. 'Have you any objection to the coast of North Wales?'

'No.'

'That is settled then. I have written to engage lodgings at a snug little place on the cliff. I stayed there years ago, and I saw it advertised the other day. Will that suit you?'

He turned round and looked Lyon in the face, and noticed the change in him. He had only spoken the truth in saying he had been overdoing it; the signs were plain to read.

'It will suit me. But ought you to come, Guy? I am not to come back under a couple of months.'

'All the better. I hate a short stay anywhere. When shall we go?'

'I cannot possibly till next week. I will come home with you now and wish your father and sister good-bye. I suppose courtesy demands as much.'

He rose listlessly, every movement showing weariness and lassitude. Guy watched him anxiously.

'I say, old fellow, you will have to put a stop to this hard work, or it will put a stop to you. I wish you had someone to look after you.'

'I think I have.'

'Oh, I'm not much good,' replied Guy, crossly. 'I ought to have been down before. Do you really mean to go and wish them good-bye?'

'It will only be a brief call. I must get back soon.'

Guy was silent. He was debating whether he should repeat the substance of what had passed between him and his father. On the whole he thought he had better wait and see what came of this visit. Knowing nothing of his sister's thoughts and wishes it would not, perhaps, be wise to raise expectations

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which might be dashed to the ground. At the same time he felt very uncertain how Lyon would receive it.

Mr. Wycherley was out, and Alison upstairs with Sybil. Guy went to find her, and Lyon went into the library to wait. He could not sit down, but restlessly paced the room, repenting that he had come as he listened for the footsteps on the stairs. She came in at last, and stood beside him at the low open window. Guy had told her that he was ill, but she was not prepared for the visible change in the grave, tired face.

'You are ill,' she said, with quick alarm. 'What is the matter, Mr. Lyon?'

'I have only been working too hard,' he answered, looking down into the troubled eyes, and wondering at the anxiety they betrayed. 'Your brother has consented to come into Wales with me, but I am afraid you will scarcely be willing to spare him.'

'We shall be more than willing! Who should go with you if not Guy? He has been telling me about it, and says you ought to have gone before. I wish you had! It is so wrong to delay.'

Why would she speak with such eager earnestness? It made it harder for him. He had reckoned too much on his strength.

'I have waited, hoping to pull through without leaving town,' he said mechanically. 'There is so much to do.'

'For others? Never for yourself. It is not right, Mr. Lyon!'

'No; I have waited too long, but the sea breezes will soon set me up again.'

'And you will take care?' she said, wistfully. 'We shall be so anxious.'

'For me?'

She looked up, and then she knew it all. The deep, strong, passionate love which had been crushed down so long had risen in rebellion, and she read it in the yearning tenderness of the weary eyes.

'Forgive me! I did not mean to tell you! But it can do you no harm to know that you have won such love as mine! it cannot hurt you to know that you have shown me how much of heaven God gives to some. Do not fear; I shall not trouble you with my love. This is the last time such words shall cross my lips. Perhaps it is as well you should know! you will at least acquit me of discourtesy in refusing

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to come where every minute increases the strength of a lasting love. I know you will not scorn it, and I am not ashamed to tell it! Good-bye, my darling, my darling!'

For one moment the low voice lost its self-control, and then he stooped and touched the little, soft white hand, with hot and burning lips.

The hall door banged, and Guy came running down. 'Where is Lyon? You don't mean to say he has gone, Alison?' He took her hands in his and looked searchingly down into the white face. 'Has he told you?'

'Yes! Oh, Guy!' And then she put her head down on his shoulder and burst into passionate tears. 'Oh, Guy, I did not know—I had no idea!'

'Of course not! Who would have? I was taken by surprise, I can tell you. What have you said to him, Alison?' said Guy, jealous for his friend.

'Nothing: he did not wait—he did not ask for any answer.'

'How is it left then?' cried Guy, in astonishment. 'What *did* he say? I don't understand.'

'He only told me, and then went away,' faltered Alison. 'He took the answer for granted, I suppose,' she added, with an odd little tremor in her voice, and a spice of anger which made Guy smile.

'What would your answer have been, Alison?'

'That can only concern him,' she replied, and her brother laughed.

'Quite right; I deserved the rebuke. What are you going to do?'

'I? nothing,' she answered, with a startled look. 'It is not my place to do anything, Guy.'

Guy whistled, and went into a brown study. 'Poor old Lyon,' he said, absently. 'I wonder if he would.'

'Would what?' asked Alison.

'It is just possible; I doubt him, though,' ruminated Guy. 'Shall I tell you what my father says about it, Alison?'

'Does he know?'

'Not that Lyon has spoken: how should he? But I know his sentiments on the subject.'

'What are they? Tell me, Guy.'

'He likes Lyon: he would have no objection to him even as a son-in-law, if he would but drop his present life and take up literature. He told me so himself.'

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There was silence for a few minutes: then Guy continued, in some perplexity.

'You see, Lyon is such a queer fellow. He will never come here again now. Bother the women! there's always something wrong where they are. The fact is, Lyon's too good for you, Alison.'

'That does not alter things,' she said, with a slight smile.

'I did think of telling him what the pater said. Shall I?' he went on, watching her narrowly. 'It would tell him that he need fear no opposition there.'

'He would not accept the terms, Guy.'

'Nonsense! a man will do a great deal for the woman he loves. To tell you the truth, Alison, I sincerely hope this will be the means of forcing him to abandon his quixotic ideas. It is a wicked shame for such a man to live as he does. I have talked till I am tired of hearing my own voice. Mind, if I tell him, it will be on your responsibility. I shall not name you, of course; but you must authorise me to tell him. I will not raise any false hopes—bring him here only to be refused by you. Shall I tell him?'

'How came papa to speak about it at all?'

'Oh, something about Lyon settling down. The pater was dreadfully afraid I should put ideas into your head. He need not have troubled himself; the ideas were there, it seems.'

'Don't, Guy,' said Alison, whose state of mind could not brook a joke.

'Well, there is no particular hurry. Think it over, little sister, and don't be influenced by anyone. Consult your own feelings. I will not try to influence you either way: only—if you must give me a brother, I should like Lyon; that's all.'

Alison went to her own room in sore perplexity. Never in her life had she so needed help and counsel. Lyon's words had revealed much to her, and the hidden truth was unveiled at last. She understood now much that had puzzled and wounded her: also much in her own history which had hitherto been beyond her comprehension. Her variable moods, and sensitiveness where *he* was concerned, all was explained.

For more than two hours she sat thinking, and then went down to the library. Guy was still there writing. He looked up at her entrance and stretched out his hand.

'Well, Alison?'

'What do you wish, Guy?'

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'Nay: it is your own affair: not mine. I do not mean to consult my own wishes. If I did, I should write. But just remember that by authorising me to write you do not compromise yourself with Lyon; he will never know.'

She stood, hesitating, with her hand on his shoulder.

'Well?'

'Write it, Guy.'

The die was cast, and Guy wrote in silence. When he had finished he tossed the letter to her, and she read it, with burning face. There was an account of the conversation with her father, and then a characteristic, Guy-like winding up.

'Forgive me, dear old fellow, but I felt bound to find out the pater's views, and having done so, must tell you. I will say no more than this: If you accept the terms you shall have every help I can give you, and a brother's most earnest wishes for your success.'

The letter went, and there was little sleep for Alison that night; life's hours seemed too short and full of joy to be slept away! He loved her!—he, her one hero! That was enough. She did not then go beyond that one thought. He loved her! and she bowed her head and kissed the place on which his lips had rested, and then grew hot in the moonlight at her own deed.

At his breakfast-table the next morning Lyon read Guy's letter—read it again and again, scarcely taking in all its meaning. A sleepless night had left its mark upon the haggard face, and in the sunlight he looked worse than he had done the night before.

'No bad news, I hope, Mr. John?' said Mrs. Willett, anxiously, as she took away the untouched breakfast.

'Bad news? no,' he answered, mechanically. 'Will you send round for a hansom? I must see Mr. Chester to-day, and I cannot walk.'

She went out, and stopped in the passage to brush away a tear. 'If he's a-going to die!—well, well, it's no use meeting trouble half-way!' And then she hurried down and sent for a hansom, and tried to look as cheery as usual, but failed.

All that day Lyon went about as if in a dream. Mr. Chester watched him with alarm, and ordered him out of the office.

'There are one or two things I want to see to before I go,' he said, in the same still way, and then Mr. Chester grew angry in his anxiety.

'One or two things be hanged!' he cried. 'You go home

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this moment, Lyon.' So Lyon went, and sat down in his hot room to collect his thoughts. But they were in a hopeless tangle, and with a groan he dropped his head upon his hands. The afternoon wore away, and as evening came on, he grew dizzy and faint, with the close stifling air. Outside a slight breeze was stirring, and with a feverish longing for its cool breath upon his burning brow he went out. At the corner of the street a woman caught him up and touched his arm. 'Eh, sir! but you do look bad!' she cried, as he turned his face.

'What is it, Mrs. Stern?'

She drew in her breath with a sob. 'He's dying, sir, and he does so hanker to see you again!'

He turned mechanically and followed her down the narrow street, up the stifling alley, into the beggarly room, where a man lay dying. Two or three women stood by the window weeping; he was brother and son to them. Lyon bent over the wretched bed.

'Stern!'

The eyes opened, and the lips unclosed. 'I wanted to see you once more to say, God bless you, sir! You showed me the road, and I'm going. God—bless—you, sir.'

Then the hush and silence of death, and Lyon went out, with one thought crushing down all others. 'How can I give up this? how can I leave my post?'

At the entrance of the alley a crowd had gathered round a drunken pair. The woman's voice, loud and shrill, rose high above the shouts of the lookers-on, and the man's fierce curses were ominously deep. 'Here comes Mr. Lyon,' shouted one, and the crowd gave way, with ashamed glances at each other.

'Drunk again, Miles?'

At the quiet, half-sad voice, the man stood still. 'She's drunk! She'd anger the devil himself!'

'I can't have any fighting, Miles.'

'No, sir,' and the poor wretch turned away without a word, cowed and sullen. Drunk or sober they all knew John Lyon.

A woman ran out of a little shop and called him as he passed. 'Mr. Lyon, my man's signed the pledge.'

'I'm glad to hear it. Now make him a happy home, Mrs. Lynn.'

'I will, sir, I will!' and she burst into happy tears. 'It

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was a blessed day for us, sir, when you fust put step in our house!'

'Then don't forget who sent me. I will try and see your husband when I come back. Tell him how glad I am.'

'I will. God bless you, sir.' And she stood and watched him out of sight, wiping away the tears of a great joy.

'Mr. Lyon, please sir, here's a boy wot wants to come to our night school.' A little ragged urchin was the speaker.

'Then let him come, Teddy.'

'Please, sir, he wants to come to our Bible class too.'

'Then bring him, Teddy. But there will be no class next Sunday. I am going away—I forgot the class.' The last words were spoken dreamily, and not to the boy.

'Are you going to stay away long, sir?'

'I hope not—I do not know.'

'Wot shall us all do, sir? the classes and everythink?' cried the boy with bitter disappointment.

'That will be all right, Teddy,' said Lyon patiently. How straight the path looked this evening; how directly the light shone upon it! With what a multitude of voices came the cry, '*This* is your place! Do not leave us!'

'Mr. Lyon!'

He started as a girl came suddenly forward from a doorway. 'What is it, Nancy?'

'Mrs. Willett says you are ill. What's the matter?'

'Not much, I hope. You look ill.'

'I am ill! I've been awfully ill!' she cried passionately. 'I nearly died out there in the hospital, and no one but Rose near me.'

'Rose!' he echoed.

'Aye, Rose; she came every night. Look here, Mr. Lyon, does that mean me as well as her?'

'Does what mean you, Nancy?' he asked, fighting against the dizziness and haze which was gathering over him.

'That about the white rose! you gave it her. Look, this.' She drew out a worn and tattered paper, and he recognised it. 'You gave it to Rose, and Mrs. Ripon gave it me. I've read it many a time.'

'Yes, it is meant for you, Nancy.'

'But I'm down worse in the mud than *she* was!' she wailed. 'Will He pick me up too. Oh, Mr. Lyon, I've been thinking till I'm nearly mad!'

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'What a mercy that mercy is!' he answered gently. 'Poor child! Now that you see your want of God He will show you the way to Him. Where are you going?'

'I don't know! I won't keep you standing here, sir.'

'Will you go to Mrs. Ripon? I will write to you there.'

'Yes, if you wish it. Good-bye, sir.' She vanished in the gloom beyond, and he went home.

'Mr. Wycherley has been in and out all the evening, Mr. John,' said Mrs. Willett. 'He says he sha'n't go home till he's seen you. Something about to-morrow.'

He went up into his own room, and sat down, drawing to him pen and paper. Again the weight on the top of his head seemed as if it would crush in his brain, and everything swam before his aching eyes. But he would rather answer Guy by letter than by word of mouth.

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CHAPTER XLV.

'AMOR OMNIA VINCIT!'

'HAS Mr. Lyon come in?'

'About half an hour ago, sir.'

Guy sprang up the stairs, three at a time, and went in. Lyon sat, with his arms folded on the table, his head resting on them, and did not move.

'Tired out, I suppose! What a fellow you are, Lyon! What have you been doing all day?'

There was no answer, and with alarm he put his hand on Lyon's shoulder.

'What is it, old fellow?'

Still silence, and raising the bowed head he saw that he was insensible. In a moment he was at the door, and caught Dick in the passage. 'Dick, little lad, run for Mr. Tremaine as fast as you can. Tell him it is for Mr. Lyon.'

'I'll go,' said an eager voice, which with a feeling of relief he recognised. 'No, Jim,' he answered quickly. 'I want you up here.'

Jim Dent ran up, his honest face full of anxious trouble. 'What is it, sir?'

'Come and help me. I cannot manage it myself.'

They went into the room, and lifting the motionless form placed it on the bed in the inner room. In a few minutes Mr. Tremaine came in, and nodded at Guy. 'Just what I expected,' he said briefly.

'Is it anything serious?'

'It is always serious when a man burns the candle at both ends.'

'He never fainted before in all his life.'

'But he will in the future if he doesn't take care. You won't go to Wales to-morrow, Mr. Wycherley.'

'Not if he is well enough?'

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'Oh yes! but he won't be,' returned the doctor, coolly. 'I shall not let him go from under my care for a day or two.'

He was one of those who had watched John Lyon's work in the district at first with prejudiced suspicion, but finally with admiration and respect, and now he tended him with more than mere professional interest. Satisfied at last that he might leave him, he went out and Guy followed.

'Are you going to stay here?' he asked.

'Certainly,' said Guy. 'I shall run home and tell them all about it, and be back in an hour or so. I suppose he is not in for any fever, is he?' He spoke anxiously, almost fearing the answer. But Mr. Tremaine shook his head.

'I would not answer for the consequences of a prolonged stay in London. We will get him out in the country in a few days, and with perfect rest we shall pull him round. Where's that cottage you took your little girl to?'

'The very place, and then you can come down and see him. We can go to Wales after,' said Guy. 'I'll see about it at once.' He stood talking a few minutes, and then Mr. Tremaine left. Casting his eye on the table, Guy saw a letter directed to himself. It was in Lyon's handwriting, and he took it up eagerly, knowing it to be the answer to his note of the previous evening. As he read, his face gathered disappointment and perplexity.

'I can scarcely see to write, but I wish you to get my answer before we meet to-morrow morning. All day long I have been fighting a battle which I thought had been fought and settled long ago. It is settled for ever now. You know something of my life—how I was brought up among the poor and destitute, as well as the reckless and degraded of our city lower life. You know that I took up a certain work and made it my own, and vowed to hold it as a sacred trust. To comply with the conditions in your letter I must give up all this—must abandon my post, and enter an entirely new life. I cannot, dare not do it. I love *her*, but I love my honour and my duty more. I daresay you will think this overstrained; it would seem so to many, but to me it is only a plain and unmistakable duty from which I must not swerve. Do not mistake me; the temptation has been sore. In giving up this chance of winning *her*, I give up all hope of earthly happiness such as falls to the lot of most men. I will ask no woman to

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share my present life, and *she herself* would despise the man who chose happiness at the cost of duty. I know her too well to doubt that. Do not think that I do not appreciate all you have said and done. Your sympathy and words of brotherly kindness have been as water to the thirsty land. But I would ask you now to let this drop for ever. I cannot speak about it. You know me well enough to understand this. J. L.'

The signature was hurried and blotted, and Guy knew why. Putting the letter in his pocket he went home feeling both admiration and anger. He could not help respecting the motive which influenced Lyon, but he thought it overstrained. Alison was waiting for him, somewhat anxiously.

'Guy, it is one o'clock!' she exclaimed, as he went in, and putting his hands on her shoulders, stooped to kiss her. 'What has made you so late? I was getting quite frightened! Papa went to bed long ago.'

'And so ought you to have gone. There is no Wales for us to-morrow, Alison. That tiresome fellow has been and gone and knocked himself up. I only ran home to tell you, and am going back directly. Tremaine seems anxious, but says he only wants rest and change. I am going to take him down to the cottage in a day or two, and act as nurse.'

'Is he too ill to go to Wales?' asked Alison, with quick alarm. 'Guy, is he seriously ill?'

'No; the heat made him faint—heat and fatigue. Would you like to see his answer to my letter, Alison?'

She took it silently, but did not attempt to open it. Her brother looked at her curiously.

'It is a good thing you do not care too much for him. He is right, I suppose. I must grant that, though grudgingly. But very few men would carry their principles to such an extreme. Read it, and burn it.'

Read it she did, but burn it! ah! that was another thing. Alone in her own room she read and re-read it, till every word was engraved upon her memory. At first she was conscious only of a bitter feeling of disappointment. He gave her up! But as she marked those sentences which spoke of her, and recalled the passionate love which that last interview had betrayed, hot tears rose to her eyes, and dropping her head on her hands she wept—not for herself but for him. She knew what that sacrifice had cost him. She could understand the

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struggle which had preceded it, and her heart went out to him in love and pity. Her hero was true to himself.

Guy went up the next day with a good account of his charge. Going into the library to write some letters, Alison followed him, and stood by his side, the fitful colour coming and going.

'Guy, I want you to tell papa about that letter,' she said, vainly trying to steady her voice. He looked up in astonishment.

'What for?'

'I want him to consent without that condition.'

'Alison!'

'Don't, Guy! I really mean it,' she said, painfully.

'But, my darling child, think what that involves,' he cried, unable to credit his own ears. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean that I want papa to consent without naming any conditions.'

Her brother looked at her in perplexity. 'Here's a pretty mess! What do you think my father will say? He told me not to put any such ideas in your head!'

'You did not. Mr. Lyon told me himself. Will you tell papa, Guy?'

'But do you really mean that you will marry Lyon and go down there? Alison, my dear child, it will never do!'

'Perhaps he will not want me to go down there. But if he does I will go. Don't talk about it, Guy!'

'But I don't understand! I thought you did not care for him! I must talk about it, Alison, or how am I to know what to say to my father? What am I to say?'

'Only that I want him to consent. You know what to say?'

'He will not be satisfied with my account; you will have to tell him yourself—all particulars, I mean,' said Guy, thoroughly perplexed. 'Do you want me to tell him now?'

'Yes.'

He rose, and putting both his hands on her shoulders, looked searchingly down into the blushing face. 'Little sister, are you sure of your own heart?'

She glanced up but could not speak, and only half-satisfied he went to find his father. Mr. Wycherley listened with mingled surprise and annoyance, which culminated at Alison's message.

'Alison wishes me to consent!' he cried. 'Why she cares nothing for him! You have made a mistake, Guy.'

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'I told her you would not believe my account. I was as much surprised as you are, sir; but she is in earnest.'

'Pshaw! she doesn't know her own mind! Where is she?' said Mr. Wycherley, rising. 'I will go and ask her what she means.'

'Lyon is worthy of her, father,' said Guy quietly, as his father passed him. 'And he is as dear as a brother to me.'

He had calculated the effect of the words. Mr. Wycherley stopped. 'Are you willing that it should be, Guy?'

'Yes,' was the frank reply. 'I can trust her to Lyon, father. He will make her very happy.'

Without a word the old man passed on. Alison heard him coming, and braced up her courage, expecting a strenuous opposition. She knew her father's prejudices well.

'Alison, your brother has told me things I can scarcely believe! I have come to know what they mean.'

'What cannot you believe, papa?' she asked, finding her task harder than she had anticipated.

'It is almost incomprehensible!'

'That Mr. Lyon should care for me, papa?' she said mischievously, trying to cool her burning cheeks.

'Yes: even that, miss. You are most unsuitable for him. And you know you do not really like him well enough to marry him.'

'He has not asked me yet, papa.'

'And I hope he never will! He is an honourable, sensible fellow, and has given up all thought of you now: you can see that from his letter to Guy. I admire him for his common sense in seeing that he cannot have both—his present work and you. From all I can learn from Guy, the subject is dropped, and why do you wish to bring it up again? You see plainly that he will not give up anything for your sake, so his love cannot be worth much.'

'Papa, if he were willing to agree to your terms I would not have him. At least, I should not like him half so much!' cried Alison, impulsively. 'I honour him for refusing.'

'That is all very well! But this other question—surely you do not wish to share such a life as his! What are you thinking of, Alison? Do you want to go and live in that wretched place and catch all sorts of fevers and horrible diseases? He is ill now, you see.'

'From overwork, papa. Mr. Tremaine said so. But we need not live there.'

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'He cannot afford a country house.'

'I think he can afford a different one from that, and besides, I have some money of my own, and that will help.'

Mr. Wycherley looked at her in despair. He saw she was in earnest, and gathered up all his forces.

'Have you considered the cost, Alison? Are you prepared to give up position and friends of your own class for a life of self-renunciation, for that is what it will be?'

'I have counted all the cost, papa,' she answered, bravely, but with tears in her eyes. 'Don't say no, papa,' she added beseechingly.

'But it is not right! You will find you have made a mistake, my dear,' he said, pacing the room in his perplexity. 'I have nothing against Mr. Lyon personally; I like him.'

'Then say yes! It is only fair, papa; he gave you Guy?'

'Umph, and you think one good turn deserves another?' said Mr. Wycherley, crossly. But she had touched a weak point. Still he did not yield, and probably would not have done so if Guy had not come in. Too impatient to wait any longer, he asked permission to enter in a comical tone of mock humility, which made Alison smile despite herself. The fact was he found himself growing too anxious to let things take their course without a word from him. One glance told Alison that he was an ally, and then she gave it up into his hands. Both fought well, but two were too many for one, and the old man began to waver. 'I have only you two and the child,' he said tremulously. 'I am thinking only of your happiness, my dear. If you really think that——'

'Father, I will answer for it that you will never regret it!' said Guy, eagerly. 'I know him as no one else does, and he is worthy my little sister. You need not fear for her future.'

'But that dreadful neighbourhood, Guy!'

'My dear father, Lyon would no more think of taking Alison there than of taking her to the moon! He can keep on his present work, and yet live in a decent house.'

And at last the old man gave way, and promised not to oppose it; nay, more—promised to give Lyon a welcome.

'And now please what am I to say to Lyon?' asked Guy, following Alison into the drawing-room and holding her prisoner. 'A nice state of things! It's all very well to make use of me in this way, Miss Alison! Just tell me what I am to say.'

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'Tell him that you spoke to papa, and persuaded him to withdraw the conditions.'

'That won't do, young lady! Lyon would not try to win you under present circumstances. Remember, he thinks you care about as much for him as you do for Bruno there, and would not dream of such a thing as trying to persuade you to share his life. He would deem it dishonourable.'

'With papa's consent even?'

'Yes, because he knows it means a social fall for you. Look at his letter.'

'Then what will you do, Guy?' she asked, wistfully.

'I don't know. The pater's consent will not bring him to the house. He will not come near. I am sure of that. My dear, he is as proud as Lucifer, and as obstinate when he takes anything into that stupid old head of his. The only way that I can see is to give him a message from you.'

Alison flushed crimson.

'It is the only thing that will bring him,' he repeated, watching the tremulous lips. 'What am I to say, Alison?'

She did not answer, and he waited in silence.

'What am I to say, dear?'

'Tell him I want to see him,' she said, quietly, but with evident effort.

How the rest of the day passed she did not know. Her father sat and watched her with melancholy eyes, occasionally sighing deeply. He evidently looked upon her very much as if she were doomed to martyrdom. The next noon she received a hurried scrawl from Guy, saying that he and Lyon were coming up in the evening.

It was late when they came. She heard Guy ask for her as he went into the library to their father. Slowly she went down and into the drawing-room, which she thought empty: she could not go into the other room. Guy would be sure to come and look for her presently. As she went forward a tall figure rose in the twilight and came to her, taking both her hands in his in a firm, strong clasp.

'Guy gave me your father's message—and yours,' he said, with a slight tremble in his voice. 'From you it could mean but one thing. Alison, am I right?'

She lifted her face, and he read his answer there. For a few short minutes all was forgotten in the bewildering present, and then the thought of all that was involved came back to

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Lyon with redoubled force. Was it right of him to accept the sacrifice? Ought he to take her to share such a life as his? But she answered him.

'It is no sacrifice,' she said. 'How can it be a sacrifice? What do I give up?'

'Much that as my wife you cannot have. Position, friends in your own class. Many who are glad to know you now, may refuse you recognition as my wife.'

'But what do I gain?' she said, with a quick, half-shy glance, and the faintest dimpling of the cheeks.

'Only the strong enduring love of one man's heart. Is it enough, dear one?'

'More than enough,' she answered. 'I would rather share your life than have the wealth of all the Indies.'

'But will it always be enough?' he urged, fearful still lest the future should bring upon her too great a weight of care. 'It is no light thing you are undertaking, darling. I will shield you all I can, but many duties may fall upon you as my wife that will be very strange and new,—duties of which you know nothing now.'

'I can learn. Will you teach me?' she said, looking up, with eyes full of the light of love.

What could he say?

'And are you willing to do all this for me? My darling, ought I to let you? My life is one of toil and work.'

'Then let me bring some sunshine into it,' she entreated. 'Let me help you, John; I can work—I want to work.'

'You do not know what sort of work mine is. You do not know what sort of people I go amongst. They are worse than the heathen. No! you shall never do that,' he answered sharply, shrinking from the idea with pain. Alison, his darling, exposed to the free remarks of that rough-and-ready crew! Never; while he could shield her from it.

'I will only do what you wish me to,' she answered, submissively. 'I need not go to any of those dreadful places.' And then he felt her hand tremble in his, and saw her eyelids droop and the corners of her mouth quiver into the faintest shadow of a smile as she added, 'Entreat me not to leave thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge.' Her voice faltered and failed at the last words, and she lifted her eyes to his with a mist before them of happy, unshed tears. What was the use of argument after that? Lyon gave it up.

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'And this is the man who never means to get married!'

It was Mr. Chester's voice, quaint and genial, and he stood at the open window of the cottage sitting-room, looking in with mischievous eyes. Lyon coloured and smiled. 'Mistaken identity, sir.'

'Umph! glad of it. May I come in?' He went in and took a seat opposite Lyon, still looking at him quizzically.

'How came you to change your mind?'

'I do not think it is changed.'

'What are you going to do with her? Put her in a glass case?'

'Mr. Chester, I beg you will not insult me.'

Mr. Chester laughed. 'How are you? Better?'

'Much. A fortnight's rest has done its work.'

'Rest and something else. I suppose you want to go back now?'

'No: Tremaine orders the seaside for a couple of months.'

'Sensible fellow!' said Mr. Chester, approvingly. 'Where are you going?'

'Into Wales somewhere. Wycherley has made the arrangements.'

'We are going to Wales; I and Mrs. Chester, and the child, and a friend. I wonder if you would like to come with us. We shall be very willing to have the trouble, and my wife's friend will help to nurse you, I daresay. Will you come?'

'Who is the friend?'

Mr. Chester looked at him, and the corners of his mouth gave way. 'It is Mrs. Chester's arrangement. She thought you would get well sooner if Alison were with you, so she made up the party; ourselves and the Wycherleys. Will you come?'

Little need to ask. Those two months did much for Lyon. The freedom from all mental toil and care, the perfect rest and contentment, and the pure sea breezes, brought back his lost vigour, while the familiar every-day companionship with Alison brought to each truer knowledge of the other, and with truer knowledge came deeper love. There was much to learn, but there was no disappointment attending each lesson, as is too often the case.

There was great excitement among Lyon's numerous friends when, during the winter months, the fact of his approaching marriage was made known. How it was made known he could not tell. Even Old Steady so far forgot his usual respect as to

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seize his hand and shake it heartily one night while he wished him life-long happiness, and there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes, which he brushed away with his coat-sleeve.

Winter passed, giving place to spring, and in the brightness of the May sunshine John Lyon was married. He took his wife down to a little village on the rocky coast of Cornwall, where they passed the first few weeks of their married life.

And then they came home. Not to the dull and dusty street, but to a pretty suburban villa, with a little garden rich in lovely flowers and shady trees. Not such a home as Alison Wycherley might have looked forward to, but very beautiful and sacred to Alison Lyon. They found scattered, here and there, many tokens of love from their many friends. A bookcase, filled with choice books from Mr. Chester; beautiful old china vases from Miss Randolph; lovely landscapes from Guy; all sorts of graceful nick-nacks from Mrs. Chester. Look where they would their eyes rested on some gift of love. The sailor, whom Lyon had rescued from a life of crime, and sent to sea, had brought his gift of foreign shells; the old man, who by the kindly hand of sympathy had been lifted from the depths, had brought the grey parrot he had trained with care to say quaint phrases,and left it as his 'welcome home;' and there a beautiful little cardboard model of a church from clever little Dick. But one gift touched Lyon more than any other. On the dining-room mantle-shelf there stood a handsome clock, and suspended beneath it was a roll of parchment.

'What is it?' said Alison, looking at the long list of names with curiosity. 'Read it, John.' And he read it:—

'"We, the undesigned, beg Mr. Lyon's acceptance of this clock, as a small and unworthy token of our lasting gratitude and affection for all he has done for us."'

But that was not all. There was a letter from Old Steady and Jim Dent, whose names headed the list, saying the thought had struck them to gather together all whom, to their knowledge, he had helped, and let this be their special gift. So they had set to work, and the names on the list were of those only whom he had saved from suffering, drunkenness, or crime.

But Lyon's voice faltered as he read, and Alison had to finish reading. And the happy tears started to her eyes as she drew closer to her husband's side, proud in the consciousness of being John Lyon's wife.

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It was a happy coming home.

* * * * *

'Tell me a tale, papa.'

The evening air was rich with the fragrance of flowers. The setting sun cast golden lights across the velvet lawn, and lit up the father's auburn waves, and the little child's fair curls. The graceful branches of the acacia drooped above them, and Guy looked up for inspiration.

'Once upon a time there was a great king, who ruled a great country. He loved his people very much, and wished them to be happy; but he had many enemies, who went about doing a great deal of mischief. One of them was very powerful, and he did so much harm that he made the king very sorrowful. So he sent out a number of soldiers and knights to fight him and kill him. There was one knight so brave and noble that the king gave him a special charge, and he went out to fight. Now this knight was to fight in the valley, and one day he was looking up when he saw a lovely princess in some gardens on the top of a hill. She lived there, and was not allowed to come down into the valley. Well, this knight fell in love with the beautiful princess and wanted to marry her, so she told him to come up and see her, and he went. And then she told him, no—her father told him that if he wanted to marry his daughter he must come out of the valley, and leave off fighting, and live in the garden on the top of the hill; and that made the poor knight very sorrowful. He could not do this, because he had sworn to be a faithful knight, and the king trusted him. So he gave up the beautiful princess and went away very sad. But the princess knew that he was loyal and true, and instead of being angry with him she was glad; and she went to her father and said—I will go down into the valley too. So she went and they were married, and lived happily ever afterwards.'

And lifting her head Alison saw her husband standing near, listening, and watching her with grave and tender eyes. She rose and went to him, lifting her face to meet his lips.

'Is the valley as fair as the hills, my wife?' he whispered.

'Far fairer—with you.'

And on the drowsy air came the echo in the child's sweet, sleepy voice: 'And lived happily ever afterwards.'

THE END.

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